

The Many Downsides of Werewolf Bureaucracy

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Fandom:

[Teen Wolf \(TV\)](#)

Relationship:

[Derek Hale/Stiles Stilinski](#)

Character:

[Derek Hale](#), [Stiles Stilinski](#), [Sheriff Stilinski](#), [Scott McCall \(Teen Wolf\)](#), [Talía Hale](#), [Peter Hale](#), [Lydia Martin](#), [Allison Argent](#), [Cora Hale](#), [Laura Hale](#), [Danny Mahealani](#), [Kira Yukimura](#), [Alan Deaton](#), [Other Character Tags to Be Added](#), [Chris Argent](#)

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The Many Downsides of Werewolf Bureaucracy

by [onceupon_adream](#)

Summary

Stiles is thirteen, and his life is over. His best friend is about to become a werewolf to cure his asthma, and there's nothing Stiles can do about it. Well, there's one thing: he can apply to be a human part of the pack. He does, but gets rejected - or so he thinks. Five years later, Peter Hale brings up an obscure clause in the contract he signed, forcing him to formally court a werewolf of the Hale pack. Scott says Stiles can court him - they're best bros, after all - but there are other forces at work.

Or, Stiles accidentally has to court Derek Hale, who won't let him phone it in.

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles is thirteen, and his life is over. His best (only) friend is about to become a *werewolf*, and there's nothing Stiles can do about it. Which, believe him, he's tried. He even tried to enlist Lydia's help, strawberry blonde genius that she is, but she told him that math was more her thing, and if lycanthropy cured asthma, what was the point in her trying to find another way? She wants to do something unique, which Stiles totally respects, but that doesn't help him in the here and now!

"Stiles, it's not like we won't be friends anymore. You know you'll always be my best bro. I'll just also have to hang out with my pack sometimes. Hey, you could join us! There's always humans at pack stuff!" Scott's trying to be reassuring, and bless him, he really does look earnest.

He's right, though. Like most werewolf packs, the Hales have plenty of human members. The human world took the whole werewolf revelation rather well, according to the history books, and there's plenty of intermingling. Maybe Stiles is being dramatic. He *is* rather good at that.

Stiles clambers off Scott's bed, and gives him a Stilinski hug. He's careful not to mess up Scott's suit, which only looks marginally ridiculous on him. Werewolves get hung up on formality, who knew?

"Okay, Scotty. Go do your Bite Ceremony thing, and I'll see you in three days. That's when you can have visitors, right?"

“Yeah,” says Scott. “They need to make sure we’re not overwhelmed by bloodlust. I don’t want to hurt you.” He says it so seriously, but Stiles can’t imagine Scott ever hurting anyone. Stiles always has to bring spiders outside instead of killing them when he’s over at Scott’s house.

Stiles claps Scott on the back, gives him another hug, and heads out to the car, where his dad is waiting. “How was the tearful goodbye?” says his father, grinning.

“Very funny, Dad. Uh, it was fine. I’m gonna visit him in three days, once he’s gotten over the ‘bloodlust,’ as he put it.”

“Sure, son. You ought to be close enough to family that they’ll let you in. Everything will be fine.”

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Everything is not fine. It’s three days later, and Stiles is on the steps of the main house of the Hale estate, arguing with Talia Hale herself.

He managed to get into the Hale estate mostly because his dad drove him in, and the Sheriff has to be on good terms with the Beacon Hills (and surrounding Northern California area) Alpha, but it all fell apart when he got out of the car. The werewolf who answered the door sniffed him once and refused him entry, not budging when he said he was here to see Scott McCall. Only family was allowed, and Stiles was *not* family. By invoking the Sheriff, Stiles made enough of a scene that what seemed like half the Hale pack emerged from all corners of the land, including the main family line: Talia, the Alpha, Peter, her Right Hand, and her kids, Laura, Derek, and Cora.

"I'm afraid we cannot bend the rules for you, young man," says Talia, sighing. "It's just not safe, and it sets a bad precedent. Your friend is fine, adjusting well, and will be able to return to regular society in about a week. You can see him then."

Stiles fights the urge to stamp his foot. "You're so isolationist! Just because I'm human—"

Peter Hale takes a threatening step forward, and Stiles backs off. A little.

Derek Hale speaks up, looking angry. "We are not isolationist! We offer the bite to people who want it, and there's plenty of humans in the pack! We don't exclude humans."

"But God forbid a human *doesn't* want to be a werewolf and isn't already related to you," scoffs Stiles. "You're not as perfect and inclusive as you think you are. Just because Scott and I aren't *actually* brothers, I suddenly can't hang out with him anymore? Ugh! You all suck. I didn't want to be part of this dumb pack anyway." Stiles storms off, and makes his dad drive him home, ignoring all his questions in favor of staring angrily out the window.

Maybe he's acting a little immature. He's thirteen, it's allowed.

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The thing is, though, Stiles *does* want to be part of the Hales' 'dumb pack.' Mostly so he can hang out with Scott all the time, but hey, he has no other friends. He has to fight for what he's got. So when he gets home the night of his disastrous fight with Talia and Derek Hale, Stiles starts a whirlwind of research.

Eventually, he strikes gold: there's a certain petition a human can file with their local pack, called a "Pack-Adjacency Application," that would allow him to be, well, pack-adjacent. He wouldn't be part of the pack officially, but he'd have the right to hang out at the Hale estate, and to participate in the more human-friendly pack activities. Not full moon runs, though; werewolves are (surprise) territorial, especially on the full moon, and will run off all humans that don't smell like mate or family. Stiles, of course, is neither.

The application is surprisingly easy to complete; Stiles has to fill out his reasoning (missing his best bro), his established relation to the pack (his best bro is a member of it), and then he has to seek out the Hales' official magic-user to bind it. This he does the next day (hey, what is summer vacation for if not ridiculous impulse decisions?) at the Hale Pack Building downtown. All pack hometowns have a building like this, where all the official, bureaucratic work of being a pack gets done. The one in Beacon Hills is tall and imposing, but Stiles is a brave thirteen-year-old with a knack for research, a love of his best friend, and a dad who's willing to spend his day off being the parental permission for Stiles's attempt to join a pack of werewolves.

When he finally finds the magic-user, Deaton, it becomes a little more complicated. Deaton is understandably wary of performing binding magic on a thirteen-year-old, even *with* his dad's go-ahead. Stiles has to point out that, since he's a minor, the contract is less binding, plus, he's been friends with Scott long enough to know that it's not gonna stop now. Also, the under 18 thing is the only reason he can even do this contract—if you're over 18, you can't be pack adjacent without a familial connection or a mate-bond. Something about adults being less trustworthy. Finally, Deaton agrees.

When Deaton is finished with the ritual, Stiles feels a rush of *something* swelling in him, a potential within him. There's even a hint of animal, of *wolf*.

"It worked!" he exclaims, turning to his dad, eyes bright. His dad cuffs him on the shoulder, smiling, and excuses himself for the bathroom.

"It's not complete, mind you," Deaton cautions him. "The Hales have to accept it. If they do, you'll feel that magic again, and if they don't, it'll leave you. If they reject you, they'll probably send you a formal letter. For now, though, go file it with Brenda in the petitions office. Take a left out of my office, then two rights, and you'll see it."

Stiles runs off, and is on the first right when he bumps into a solid body. It's Peter Hale.

"What's this?" Peter snatches the contract out of Stiles's hand, and gives it a once-over. "Eating your words, are you?"

"Give it back!" Stiles reaches for it, but Peter is taller than him, and stronger, too.

"I'll pass it along for you," Peter assures him. "I'll even put in a good word. Don't you worry, you'll be part of our pack. Just you wait." He winks, grossly, and walks down the hall, holding the contract and whistling cheerily.

What a weirdo, thinks Stiles. But Peter takes a right into the petitions office, so Stiles figures he's all set. He finds his dad leaving the bathroom, tells him everything's taken care of and it's in the Hales' hands now, and they head home.

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Stiles never feels that magic again, and eventually, he forgets about the whole thing, or at least buries it in the back of his brain.

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Despite not becoming pack-adjacent, Stiles remains Scott's best friend. He even gets more friends as they move through high school: Allison, Scott's girlfriend; Lydia, Allison's best friend and Stiles's first crush; Danny, the reason for Stiles's bisexual awakening; Cora Hale, Lydia's girlfriend, who tolerates Stiles; and Kira, a transfer student their senior year that everyone loves.

Basically, Stiles is living his best life. He's eighteen at last, it's the final semester of his senior year, and he's just coasting.

Then Derek Hale returns to town, fresh from four years at Columbia with a B.A. in History, and everything goes to shit.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! This is the prologue to a multi-chapter work I'm starting. I have it mostly (roughly) planned out, but only this is actually written. I plan to update once a week, though. Let me know if you like it/ think it's worth continuing!

Also: Stiles is 18 for every chapter except most of this one, and the characters that will show up don't really follow any sort of canon timeline, because I said so.

Letters and Meetings and Werewolves, Oh My!

Chapter Notes

Turns out I have no willpower... you guys are getting this early because it's done, and because I most likely won't be posting the next two weeks because I will be very busy. I might post next week, but probably not the week after that. But after that we'll be back on schedule.

Also this chapter is way longer, so yay!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's a sunny Friday afternoon in Beacon Hills, and Stiles is feeling the love. School just got out, he and Scott have bro-time planned after dinner, and college acceptances are coming in. Stiles should know better by now, though, than to think that nothing could go wrong.

Stiles barges into his house, yells "Yo, Dad!" down the hall at his dad's office, and heads for the mail. It's mid-March, so he's still waiting on a few responses from colleges before he really stops putting any effort in at school. It might be superstitious of him, but he doesn't want to stop working hard until he actually gets into his dream school. The mail's not on the kitchen table, though. Stiles rolls his eyes. He already had a talk with his dad about opening his college letters—sure, it was great getting a text in the middle of the school day that he'd gotten into UC Davis, but Stiles wants to have the full experience.

Stiles walks down the hall to his dad's office, and can immediately tell something is wrong. There's a small glass of whiskey at his dad's elbow, and a furrow in his dad's brow. "Hey, Dad? Did I not get into Harvard or something? You know that was a reach for me; I'm not Lydia, and we mere mortals have to be content with the lesser Ivys. Stanford is gonna be great. Wait, did I not get into Stanford?" At this point, Stiles has psyched himself out, and has to grip the doorframe to keep himself standing. "Please tell me I didn't get rejected from Stanford, I might cry. Probably not immediately, because I'll want to be stoic in front of you, but I'll definitely disappear into my room and cry myself to sleep."

Sheriff Stilinski laughs. "No, nothing like that, son. I promised I wouldn't open your college letters, and I haven't. The only one you got today was from Brown, though, so you probably wouldn't have cared. But you got this other letter, from the Hale pack, that looked official. So I opened it, in case it was important, and—" he cuts himself off, and hands the letter over to Stiles. It reads:

Dear Mr. Stilinski,

Your application for pack-adjacency with the Hale Pack of Northern California (den: Beacon Hills) has been processed. Please report to the Hale Estate at 8 pm on Friday, March 20th for a formal hearing with Alpha Talia Hale to begin the ritual.

As you have signed a binding magical contract, you must make an appearance at the hearing for your own safety and the safety of the contracted pack.

Regards,
Brenda Merritt, Hale Pack Contracts Department

“What the *fuck*? Sorry, Dad. But like, what kind of Goblet of Fire magic bullshit – sorry again – *is* this? I have to meet with Talia for ‘my own safety and the safety of the Hale pack?’ Well, fuck the Hale pack!” Stiles paces agitatedly back and forth in his dad’s cluttered study, avoiding the various old case files on the floor, trying to make sense of it all.

“Scott’s in the Hale pack, Stiles. I understand your disregard for your own safety—not that I agree with it, but you’ve always been reckless—but I would think you’d have some interest in Scott’s,” says Stiles’s dad, reasonably. “Now, have you filed any more applications with the Hale pack that I don’t know about, or is this the same one from when Scott had just been Turned?”

“I definitely haven’t filed anything new with the Hale pack, Dad. I want nothing to do with the Hale pack! Except Scott, and Cora. Although Cora doesn’t really like me. She just has to hang out with me cuz she’s dating Lydia...” Stiles reins himself in. He doesn’t need to go off on this particular tangent right now.

“So I guess it’s the one from five years ago? I don’t know why it would’ve taken them that long to process it, though. Are they that behind?” Stiles starts thinking about the pitfalls of bureaucracy, and too many cooks in the kitchen—or maybe not *enough* cooks, as the case may be, but his father interrupts him.

“No, it’s definitely strange. Government moves slowly, but not *that* slowly. And werewolf packs are generally quite efficient. I think we should go to this meeting, at least to see what this is all about. But Stiles, why didn’t you ever follow up on your application?” Stiles’s dad turns his police interrogation eyes on Stiles, who flops onto the sofa. This is

a mistake, because the sofa in the Sheriff's study is notoriously (at least, among the Stilinskis and McCalls) stiff and uncomfortable.

"Owww. Um. Well, the magic guy, what was his name? Started with a D, I think. Heh. D. Anyway, that guy said that I would feel the magic again if the Hales accepted me, and if they didn't, I wouldn't feel anything. He said I'd probably get a rejection letter, but not necessarily? And I didn't get any letter, but I still just assumed they'd denied me cuz they remembered I was the idiot who called them exclusionist dicks. Sorry, jerks. And then I stopped worrying about it, because me and Scott were still friends once he got over the whole furry little problem thing. So uh, yeah," Stiles finishes, somewhat lamely. His dad has been looking more and more amused with every word. He should be used to the way Stiles's brain works by now, but apparently not.

"Well, that was certainly enlightening," said the Sheriff. "You can tell the Hales that if they ask, just leave out the exclusionist dicks part this time. Why don't you go work on your homework for a little while, and we'll head over there after dinner for the meeting? I'll try and make something easy so we can eat early."

"Nice try, Dad," says Stiles, wagging a finger at him. "I know easy to make is just code for unhealthy. If you start now, you can definitely have something actually healthy ready by dinnertime. I believe in you." With that, Stiles heads upstairs to his room. He's going to do his homework, sure, but first he's going to call Scott.

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Scott doesn't pick up, at which point Stiles remembers why their bro-time was scheduled for after dinner: Scott has

mandatory wolfy time on Friday afternoons until about sundown. Sundown, since it's March, is about 7 pm, so Scott won't have opposable thumbs or the ability to give Stiles any insight until an hour before the meeting. Stiles sends Scott a text in the hope that Scott will call him before 8.

To Scott: SCOTTY I NEED YOUR WEREWOLF KNOW-HOW
I'm in trouble with the Hale pack

That should get the point across.

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Apparently it doesn't get the point across, as it's now 7:30, Stiles has finished dinner, and there's no response of any kind from Scott. One could say that Stiles is stressed out. One could also say that it's time to go to the Hale estate. In fact, someone *is* saying that. Stiles's dad, to be exact.

"Kid! Let's go! It's not a great idea to keep werewolves waiting!"

Stiles stumbles down the stairs. His dad looks over his outfit with a discerning eye. He's wearing dark jeans and the one collared shirt he owns that isn't plaid. He thinks he looks okay; he even brushed his hair. His dad is in his Sheriff's uniform, presumably to intimidate. *Good luck with that, Stiles thinks sourly. These guys can conjure claws out of thin air.*

"Alright, let's go," says his dad, making a sweeping gesture towards the front door. "Hopefully they didn't want you to wear a suit, because I doubt you own one." He looks over at Stiles and must see some of his anxiety in his eyes, because he stops him for a hug in the middle of the hallway. "Hey. I'm sure this won't be a big deal. They legally can't—and

wouldn't, since they're good people—hurt you for applying to be part of the pack. This meeting is probably just a formality to dissolve the contract, since I bet you need a magic user for that." Stiles slumps in his father's arms, nose in his dad's shoulder. It smells like gunpowder and the terrible coffee the station provides for free.

They stand there for a minute, and then his dad claps him on the back and releases him. They walk out to the car and start the journey to the Hale estate, a sprawling mass of land encompassing most of the Beacon Hills preserve. Since the Hale pack territory is enormous, its members don't all live in Beacon Hills, but the ones that do live on the estate. It's got a good fifty houses on it, one medium-sized apartment complex, and the Hale House, where Talia, her husband Eric, their kids, and Talia's brother Peter live. The place is huge, and just as intimidating as it was when Stiles was thirteen.

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They drive up to the front gate of the estate. The whole place isn't fenced off, since werewolves like their freedom, but it's common courtesy to state your name and reason for requesting entry at the front gate and ask to be let in. Not that Stiles is ever that interested in common courtesy, but his dad is. Plus, the only road to the Hale estate goes through that gate, and the police cruiser isn't really equipped for off-roading. Well, it technically is, but then someone would have to clean it. So they go to the main gate.

There's an intercom there not unlike Edna's in *The Incredibles*, with radio and video capability. Stiles's dad taps the 'call' button, which rings once before being picked up. A gruff voice says "Welcome to the Hale estate. Please

state your name and business.” Stiles opens his mouth, and his father shoots him a *look*.

“Sheriff and Stiles Stilinski, here to see Alpha Hale. We have an appointment at 8.” There’s rustling on the other end, and then they’re told to hold. Stiles groans, and his father whispers, “Stiles! They can probably still hear us!” Right. Better not to get off on the wrong foot.

Although, Stiles considers, they *already* got off on the wrong foot, five years ago. So would this be getting off on the second wrong foot? Like having two left feet?

Stiles’s musings about the etymology of foot-related idioms is cut off by the crackling sound of the speaker and the opening of the silver gate (someone in the Hale pack clearly thinks they’re funny; Stiles almost wants to meet them).

“Come on in,” says the voice on the other end. “A representative of Alpha Hale will meet you on the steps of the Hale house.”

Stiles waits until they’re past the gates to complain. “A *representative*? Do we not even get to talk to the Alpha? What the hell!”

His father shoots him another quelling look. “I assume this representative is just going to escort us, so we don’t get lost in the house.”

“So we don’t steal anything, more like,” says Stiles.

“Well, maybe they’re a little worried about malicious intent,” says Stiles’s dad, “but can you blame them?”

Maybe not. While most of the world was pretty accepting of the revelation of supernatural creatures, and it happened long enough ago that the initial vitriol died down almost

completely about twenty-five years ago, there are still speciesist factions. One such faction is an offshoot of the Hunters. The Hunters are a group of people that have been in the know about the supernatural for just about forever, and acted as vigilantes, putting down supernatural creatures that have hurt others. However, not all Hunters believed that supernatural creatures were anything but creatures. A radical faction of them broke off officially about ten years ago, and make it their lives' work to fight against the inclusion of werewolves, magic-users, etc. in everyday society. And one particular member of this group, Kate Argent, was made infamous for almost burning down the entire Hale estate almost 6 years ago. Stiles doesn't know the details behind why it didn't work—or why it almost worked—but he gets that the Hales might be a little wary because of it.

“Fine,” says Stiles, as his dad parks the car in the Hale House's huge driveway. “I'll be nice.”

“That's all I ask,” says his dad. “Well, being polite and respectful would be good too, if you can manage it.” They walk up the drive, and Stiles can see someone waiting on the front porch.

It's Scott.

Stiles jogs up to him. “Hey, dude! You never called me back! Did you lose your phone? Is that why you're still here? We can give you a ride, after I do this dumb meeting thing. But can't you run fast enough that you wouldn't need a ride anyway?” Stiles takes in a breath, and Scott interrupts. He's been friends with Stiles long enough to know that sometimes that's the only chance he'll get to say anything.

“No, I didn’t lose my phone. I just got your text like two minutes ago, because I was talking to Alpha Talia, and by that time I could already smell you coming, so I figured I’d wait. Um, I’m supposed to bring you to the meeting room,” Scott says, looking curious. “Talia didn’t really tell what it’s all about, just that it was pack business, and you and I were involved. What’s up? Hi, Mr. Stilinski,” he adds, looking at Stiles’s dad, who saw no reason to run and is just now catching up to them.

It takes a second, but then it all clicks in Stiles’s head. Of course Scott has to be at this meeting; he was the whole reason for Stiles’s application.

“It’s a paperwork error, we think. Remember when you were first Turned, and you didn’t have much time to hang out because you had to do all those control exercises and pack-bonding trust falls and stuff?”

“There were no trust falls,” says Scott. “That’s not a very useful exercise if you can heal from almost anything in minutes.”

“Huh,” says Stiles. “Never thought of that. But like, duh. Anyway, so I filled out that request for pack-adjacency, to hang out with you more, right? And they never got back to me, so I assumed it was one of those things where they don’t feel like it’s necessary to formally reject you. But then earlier today, they sent me a letter saying they’d finally processed it and summoning me to a meeting tonight.”

Scott looks contemplative, and a little guilty. Stiles figures he feels bad about leaving him alone for those few months when they were thirteen, but it’s fine. Scott didn’t have a choice, and as soon as he could, he was back to hanging out

with Stiles. It's all in the past—or it *would* be, if this hadn't happened.

Scott leans in for a hug. It's tight and honestly life-affirming, as all his hugs are. He smells like dirt and the wilderness and his laundry detergent.

"You smell like dirt," Stiles whispers.

Scott laughs, then says "Hey. You know we're always gonna be best friends, right? The pack thing didn't matter then, and it doesn't matter now. I mean, the pack matters, but you matter more. You and Mom and your dad, you're my OG pack." Stiles grins, sniffing a little. His allergies are bad this time of year.

His dad pats both of them on the back, and says, "Alright, kids. Let's face the music, shall we?" Scott nods, and leads them into the house to the meeting room.

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The meeting room is kind of everything Stiles ever expected a werewolf pack's center of operations to be. Two of the walls have bookshelves absolutely bursting with books about magic and magical creatures, many of which look tattered enough to be frequently referenced. Another wall has a large, stylized triskelion painted on it—the crest of the Hale pack. The centerpiece of the room is an enormous table made out of what looks to be oak. Stiles barely has a moment to take this all in, though, before his attention is drawn to the two people already in the room: Talia and Peter Hale, Alpha and second of the Hale Pack. They both have *very* imposing presences, which Stiles thinks a little wildly must be useful in staredowns.

“Welcome,” says Talia. “Sit down, all of you.” She sweeps a hand at the (also oak) chairs around the table, and Stiles gingerly takes a seat. He notices vaguely that the part of the table he’s sitting at has something carved into it: the initials D. H. The D is backwards, though. *Probably a bored baby werewolf just growing into his claws*, Stiles thinks. It’s a funny image, but Stiles manages not to laugh, mostly because Peter Hale is *looking* at him like he wants nothing more than to huff and puff and blow his house down. Which, okay, makes Stiles one of the three little pigs, but hopefully he’s the one with the brick house. Even if he’s not built like one.

“So,” says Talia, leaning forward in her chair, (*as if she needs to be more intimidating*, Stiles thinks hysterically) “I asked you all to come here to address a petition young Mr. Stilinski—” she nods at Stiles— “filed with us several years ago. It was brought to my attention recently by my brother Peter, who found it gathering dust on the floor behind a desk in our petitions office last week. First, I would like to apologize for this delay. Clearly, the application got lost in the shuffle somehow, and as you never followed up with us about it, it was forgotten.” Stiles *really* wants to interrupt her to defend his not contacting the pack again, but he restrains himself, and Talia continues.

“Normally, this wouldn’t be an issue. We would just reject the application, in the presence of you and the related pack member—” she nods at Scott— “but your age makes that impossible. As you might already know, this particular form is geared towards people under 18 who are not mated to or related by blood or adoption to anyone already in our pack. Since you are now technically an adult, it doesn’t apply to you in the same way. However, as our magic-user Alan Deaton explained to me earlier this week, the contract is still magically binding. The magic is under the impression—

as much as magic can be under *any* impression—that you still want to be part of the pack, but it won't allow you to join it through under-18 pack-adjacency." Talia stops for a moment to take a breath, and Stiles steals Scott's tactic for dealing with word vomit.

"So what does all that mean?" He directs the question at the Alpha, but it's Peter Hale who answers it.

Peter steps forward, and if Stiles didn't know better, he'd think he was smirking. "It means, dear boy, that you're going to have to join the pack another way."

"What other way?" interjects Stiles's father. "And why does he have to join the pack? He doesn't even want to anymore!" His hand is drifting threateningly close to the empty holster at his belt.

"It's the magic of the contract," says Talia. "Back when this sort of thing was first becoming established, another pack had a legal dispute about the fairness of a rejection they issued. The human in question claimed she hadn't been given due consideration. As such, pack applications nationwide have to have a specific magical compulsion built in, which insists on a fair trial of sorts. Since Stiles is over 18, and can no longer apply to be part of the pack through Scott, we can't reject him based on his already established friendship with him. And since he and Scott are not related, there's only one option."

Talia takes in a deep breath, as if psyching herself up. Stiles has a feeling that's bad news for him. Finally, she says, "Stiles has to court a member of the pack with the intention of mating with that individual, and once that process has been completed, he can be rejected."

Everyone is shocked into silence for a moment, except Peter, who's drumming his fingers on the table. Stiles can't read him well enough to tell what exactly his expression is.

"What happens if we ignore this 'compulsion?'" asks his father, finally breaking the silence.

"Do I have to actually mate someone?" Stiles adds, immediately after. This seems like the more important issue.

Peter says, "You'll destroy our pack."

Stiles isn't sure which question that's an answer to.

"What Peter means," says Talia, reprovably, "is that the magic of the contract will find the Hale pack at fault. As this is not a case of a very serious contract breach, it will only weaken, and not completely sever, pack bonds. However, you can understand why we would still like to prevent this."

"So it has no consequences for *me*?" Stiles clarifies.

If Talia were anyone but the Alpha of one of the biggest packs in the country, Stiles bets she'd be fidgeting. "Well, no," she says. "But I would think you would find it somewhere in your heart to feel compassion for us."

Scott speaks up, at last. "Dude, this is *my* pack, remember? And even if it weren't, it's the right thing to do. You can mate me if you have to, if it's for the good of the pack." He sits up straighter in his chair and takes on what Stiles assumes Scott thinks is an appropriately martyred expression.

Talia speaks up again. "You don't actually have to mate him, just go through the steps. He can reject you once the steps

have been deemed complete, and then the pack can reject you, and we can move on from this.”

Stiles turns to his dad, who says, “Son, I think you should do it. As long as you don’t have to, ah, have sex with Scott or anything. Because that would be crossing several lines.” He turns to the werewolf contingent, arms crossed.

Peter’s laughing, but he manages to say, “That’s not one of the steps. Don’t worry, no one’s taking your son’s precious little—”

“Peter!” says Talia. Her eyes flash red. Peter looks abashed, but only slightly.

Stiles stands up. “Alright,” he says, trying to sound firm. He immediately destroys any chance he had at that by following it up with “Let’s get this party started. Scotty and me will fake court, he’ll reject me for his lovely Allison, and we’ll all be out of each other’s hair. When can we start?”

“Tomorrow,” says Talia. “The first step is a formal declaration of intent to court. We’ll need more witnesses, and it has to be at midday anyway. All three of you, come back at noon. Oh, and Stiles?” she adds, as they turn to go. He looks back at her. “Thank you,” she says.

“Yes,” adds Peter. “*Thank you.*”

Chapter End Notes

....my eternal love to anyone who gets both Harry Potter references in this chapter. Maybe a shout-out in the next chapter's notes, too.

This chapter is a lot of just exposition and world-building, but the good stuff starts in the next chapter!

By that I mean Derek appears. (i know he was in chapter 1 but stiles was 13 and focused on other things, so).

Anyway, let me know what you think! I greatly appreciate every comment and kudos and bookmark. Have a wonderful day/night/week!

The Plot Thickens

Chapter Notes

Wooo! Another chapter! you might get one next week, too. I'm going to be less busy than I thought. Anyway, this chapter has Derek, so... enjoy.

Also, it has like three pov changes between Stiles and Derek. They should be noticeable anyway, but I marked them with a longer page break. Let me know if it's still confusing and I'll fix it somehow.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next morning, Stiles is startled awake on the last ring of a phone call from an unknown number. He's not with it enough to answer the phone, does little more than blink blearily at it, in fact, but whoever it is leaves a message. After he's gone to the bathroom and splashed a little water on his face to wake himself up, Stiles gives it a listen.

Good morning Stiles, this is Talia Hale. I was wondering if you would mind coming a little earlier than noon so we could speak privately? I thought about this...situation a little more after you left last night, and would like to clarify a few things. Please come by at 11 if you can. Thank you.

Stiles looks at the clock. It's a little after 10 in the morning. He pulls on his most sedate plaid shirt (since he wore the collared one already) and a non-wrinkled pair of pants, and heads downstairs. His dad is up, of course, since he's not a teenager.

"Hey, Stiles. You're up a little early. Are you nervous?"

“Um, no. It’s a fake courtship with Scott, Dad, nothing to be nervous about. I’m up because Talia Hale called me. She asked me to come by a little early to ‘clarify a few things,’ which I think is politician-speak for... well, I don’t know, exactly. But I’ll find out!” he finishes cheerfully, putting a piece of bread in the toaster and grabbing a yogurt.

“Does she want you to come alone?” his father asks. “I mean, I’ll definitely be there for the ceremony—I took a half-day off for this—but we can arrive separately if that’s necessary.”

Around a mouthful of yogurt, Stiles responds, “Yeah, she wanted to talk privately. So I’ll head over when I’m done eating, and you can come at noon. Be on alert for any distress signals, in case they grind my bones to make their bread.” Stiles delivers a particularly shit-eating grin at his dad, who rolls his eyes.

“That’s the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, Stiles. It’s not even a wolf-specific reference. And if it were, that would be rude. Just because you had a bad experience with a wolf pack doesn’t mean all werewolves are evil.”

“I know,” says Stiles. “I’ll try and keep the wolf jokes to a minimum. I’m mad at them for excluding me, not for being werewolves.” His toast pops up at this point, and Stiles spreads peanut butter on it and (heh) wolfs it down. He runs back upstairs to brush his teeth, grabs his phone and keys, and walks out to his car. “See ya soon, Dad!” he calls, and puts the car in gear.

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After going through the whole rigmarole at the front gate again, this time without his dad to be the diplomatic presence, (Stiles thinks he does okay, regardless) Stiles

pulls up outside the Hale house again. It's prettier and more majestic in the daylight. Maybe not *more* majestic—it's a wolves' den, it sort of *has* to look good bathed in moonlight—but like, majestic in a different way. Whatever, so Stiles likes houses with columns. He can't be faulted for that; they're objectively cool. Plus, they remind him of that one scene in *Mulan*.

This time it's Talia Hale herself on the front steps waiting to greet him. Stiles can't help but feel a little important when he sees that; she's the leader of the biggest werewolf pack on the West Coast, the second largest in the nation after the one in New York.

"Good morning, Alpha Hale," Stiles says when he reaches her. "What's up?" Clearly, his inner irreverent teenage boy is irrepressible, no matter how hard he tries. Luckily for him, though, Talia looks amused.

"What is, ah, *up*, Stiles, should be discussed somewhere private. If you would follow me to the meeting room? It's sound and scentproofed."

"Of course, the werewolf ears," says Stiles, running forward a little so he can walk beside her. He doesn't really know werewolf etiquette on walking next to Alphas, but he figures she'll complain if he's doing something inappropriate. Talia looks amused again, though.

"Yes, the werewolf ears," she says, opening the door to the meeting room. Stiles is immediately hit by the smell of coffee and pastries, and throws her a questioning look. "I thought you might want something to eat," Talia explains.

"Totally," says Stiles, pouring himself a cup of coffee and locating a chocolate croissant. "So, now will you tell me what's up?"

Talia takes a breath. “I wanted to apologize, first of all. This whole thing is a bit of a—well, my youngest would call it a SNAFU, and my son would call it a clusterfuck.”

Stiles almost falls out of his chair.

When he’s recovered himself, (Talia Hale swearing! Talia Hale apologizing to him!) Talia continues.

“I won’t say we’re not to blame, because we absolutely could have handled some of this better—” *Yeah*, Stiles thinks. *Like not losing my application for five years* “but some of it is out of our hands. And I don’t just mean the magic. When you came to see Scott that first time, when you were both thirteen, I very much wanted to let you in. He had asked to see you, you know. But pack-human contact, especially in our dens, is strictly regulated, and not by individual packs. It’s a government issue. They have a whole committee for it in D.C. There are, of course, no laws actually prohibiting werewolf-human contact—that would be segregation—but *packs* are different. The only reason I couldn’t let you in to see Scott five years ago was because he was freshly Turned, and there are special laws for that, to protect both humans and wolves. Since you weren’t pack or technically family, you wouldn’t have smelled right to him. He might have attacked, since he didn’t have his instincts under control yet. Does that make sense?” She looks Stiles in the eyes, and seems to actually be invested in his answer.

Stiles thinks it through for a minute, then says, “Yeah, I get it, I guess. Why didn’t you tell me all this when I was thirteen? It would’ve made me feel a whole lot better, for sure.”

Talia laughs. "Oh, kid," she says, sounding so much like a mother in that moment that Stiles has to give himself a second to keep from tearing up, "I tried. Maybe I didn't explain everything quite as well back then, but I suppose I thought 'It's not safe,' would be enough to warn you off."

Stiles grimaces. "I'm the Sheriff's son, Alpha Hale. The way I see it, you have two choices in my situation: you're scared of everything, or you're deeply unworried about your own safety because all you can think about is your dad's. Besides, I only had one friend. I wasn't gonna let him go that easily." Then he thinks of another issue that Talia hasn't addressed. "Would you have let me in the pack, if you'd gotten that application?" He looks at her levelly.

She furrows her brow, but only for a moment. "Almost definitely," she says. "The only reason we might not have is if there had been an overwhelming objection. Scott was Turned very soon after the, ah, fire incident. It was only Laura's quick thinking that saved all of the pack that lived on the estate from dying that day. Some of the pack might have been wary about adding new humans that emphatically did not want the Bite."

Okay, that actually makes sense. Stiles never even thought about that.

"But you're like, over that now, right?" he asks bluntly. "I mean, enough that you're letting me court a member of your pack."

Talia actually snorts. It's a little undignified, and a lot funny, so Stiles starts laughing too. When he finally catches his breath, Talia says, "I suppose we are mostly 'over that,' yes. I assumed, last night, that you didn't still want to be part of

the pack, since your only motivation was Scott's friendship. But if you do want it, we could try to find a way."

"Wouldn't I have to actually mate with Scott for that, though? Sorry, but ew. We're brothers, even if his wolfy sense might not technically recognize it. I mean, you're right, I no longer feel like I have to join the pack to keep from feeling friendless and alone. Not that I'm, like, against it. But if the only way to join it as an adult is through the Bite, mating with someone, or being blood related, I don't see it happening."

"I suppose not," says Talia. "That's another thing I wanted to talk to you about, though. Until we had to put it in those terms, I never realized how limiting the regulations for joining a werewolf pack as a human were. Again, it's something that's out of our hands—that council I mentioned earlier makes those laws as well—but I believe it shouldn't be. That council is predominantly made up of humans, making rules about something they know little about, and I'm starting to think they're purposefully pushing isolationist policies on us. Do you agree? I'm thinking of starting a campaign about it, and I think we need a human spokesperson."

Stiles is dumbstruck. Honestly, this lady just keeps on throwing him for loops. "Um, wow," he manages. "That's...a lot. Fuck, though, you're totally right. Why the hell should a group of humans up in Washington be making the rules about this? It should be pack-by-pack, with a few ground rules at the national level, and those rules should be made by an evenly balanced of humans and werewolves." He's pacing up and down the meeting room at this point, gesticulating with the help of the muffin he's eating. So he's getting a little fired up, who can blame him? *Talia Hale* wants his help on a werewolf rights crusade. Then

something strikes him, and he stops in his tracks. “I’m not the most political person, though. I mean, I just swore twice, and I often have trouble stopping myself from speaking my mind. So maybe—”

“Maybe you’re just right,” Talia cuts in. She glances at her watch then, and looks up at Stiles, taken aback. “We can discuss this later, with your father. For now, though, we have to get outside. You have a declaration to make. It’s almost noon.”

They both leave the house by the back door, and Stiles can see the sun is, in fact, directly overhead. His dad’s here, too, as is the magic-user, Deaton, and Peter Hale, who Stiles assumes is the witness for the ceremony. Scott’s not here yet, though. Stiles checks his phone, and sees he has a text from him:

From Scott: running a few minutes late, should be there like exactly at noon, sorry! You’ll have to talk fast... shouldn’t be too much of a problem for you

Stiles laughs, and shares the text with everyone who’s assembled on the lawn.

“We’ll start as soon as he gets here,” says Deaton. “If it’s not exactly at noon, we’ll have to wait until noon tomorrow.” He hands Stiles a sheet of paper. “Here’s what you’ll have to say.” Stiles looks it over and leans against a tree to wait.

When Derek wakes up, at almost noon because it’s a Saturday morning and why not, there’s an energy in the air that’s almost tangible. He only has a second to wonder about it, though, before he breathes in. And—

Well.

Something smells so good that Derek is almost overwhelmed by the sheer *rightness* of it, like it belongs in his lungs and on his skin and in his heart and—okay. He needs to get a grip. *Yes*, says a voice inside him. *A grip on this smell, and the person attached. A grip so tight they'll never be able to escape, never want to escape, and then—*. Derek cuts off that train of thought before it wreaks havoc on his tenuous control on himself.

He knows what this is.

It's his mate. His *mate* is near enough that Derek can smell them. He takes another breath, and he's halfway out the door to go find them before he comes back to himself and retreats inside to put on pants. With careful consideration, he adds a shirt. He doesn't want to give his sisters any more reason to mock him. Plus, it's good manners to meet people while fully clothed. He can impress his mate with his muscles later. Once dressed, Derek sprints down the stairs, veers toward the back door, and bursts out into the sunshine.

Once he's outside, the smell hits him way harder, and he almost falls over. The only thing that keeps him on his feet is the fact that he hasn't actually reached his mate yet. He can see them, though. There's a whole gathering of people on the back lawn: his mother, his Uncle Peter, the Beacon Hills Sheriff, Deaton, and *him*.

Derek's mate is younger than him, is the first thing Derek realizes. Not by much, but he definitely hasn't graduated college yet. He's got messy brown hair and brown eyes and an upturned nose and freckles and long fingers that—

Ahem.

He's nice-looking, that's all Derek's saying. Well, he's *more* than nice-looking, he's enchanting, mesmerizing, dazzling - *Stop it*, Derek thinks. *I've never called someone dazzling before in my life and I'm not going to start now.*

Derek's instincts are taking over, making him call this boy *enchanting* and wanting nothing more than to grab him and take him up to his room and do *everything* with him (with his consent, of course). Derek lurches forward, half of him determined to stick his nose in that neck and just stay there and the other half trying to keep from traumatizing the boy. He's a few steps away from him when his mate starts to talk. The words pull him up short.

"Alpha Hale of the Hale Pack, I formally announce my intention to court your beta..."

What.

The rest of what his mate says is lost to the roaring in Derek's ears. His mate is trying to court him already? How can he even know who he is? Then, Derek takes another look at the boy, and realizes he's Sheriff Stilinski's son. Derek hasn't seen this kid—Stiles, he thinks his name is—since he was thirteen, but Derek remembers him. He also remembers his mother, Claudia. Claudia was one of those rare natural magic-users, a Spark. Her son could be one, too. Derek doesn't know too much about Sparks, but maybe their innate magic means they can sense mates, too. *My mate is clever*, Derek thinks. *And magical.*

Derek tunes back in to hear the last few sentences of the courtship speech. He also notices another person must have joined their little group at some point and is standing next to him: Scott McCall, one of the betas, and Stiles's best friend, at least when they were thirteen. He must have

wanted to be a witness for his best friend's courtship. Just then, Stiles speaks the last phrase of the speech, and Derek, not wanting to miss a single second, steps forward and says, "I accept."

Stiles splutters and takes three steps back, and everyone starts yelling at each other. Derek picks out his mate's voice talking to his mother, and he concentrates so he can hear better. Stiles is saying, "What the hell, Alpha Hale! I was supposed to court Scott, not this random hot guy! Is he even one of your betas? Did you plan this? What is your *agenda*, lady?"

Derek's heard enough to know that 1) he just drastically fucked up, and 2) his mate doesn't want him. He takes off for the woods to clear his head (and cry, maybe, but that's his business).

He doesn't end up being able to clear his head, though, because after about half a minute, his uncle catches up to him. "Derek!" says Peter. "What was all that? You came rushing out of the house like you had hunters on your tail, wouldn't stop staring at the Stilinski kid, and then *accepted his courtship*? He didn't even offer it to you! He's trying to court Scott! Well, not really, it's a mess, honestly. But anyway, what *happened*?"

Derek runs faster, trying to leave his uncle behind, but Peter is doggedly persistent. Eventually, Derek gives up, and sits down on a log to catch his breath. "He's my mate. I didn't hear who he was actually trying to court but I assumed it was me, so I accepted. What should I do? And what do you mean he's not really trying to court Scott?"

Peter collapses next to him. "Oh, nephew, that's too funny. These sorts of romantic disasters could only happen to you.

As for the nature of your mate's courtship with young Beta McCall, it's ceremonial. Stilinski the younger is in a bit of a bind because of a petition he filed to join our pack some years ago, and his only way out of it is to go through the motions of courting McCall and having Scott reject him at the end. But now you've mucked it all up. There's only one thing to do."

"What's that?" Derek asks.

Peter smiles widely at him, showing far too many teeth for Derek's liking. "He'll have to court *you*, nephew. You've accepted, and you're bound together now until he completes the process. And perhaps along the way you'll be able to convince him of your true love connection."

Derek frowns. "Can't I just tell him about it now? We're mates, he has to recognize that. Humans learn about that stuff in school."

Peter laughs at him. "Derek, don't you remember this boy from the last time you saw him? What makes you think that someone who condemned our pack as being isolationist would be willing to accept mystical werewolf soulmates? I would ease him into it."

"You mean trick him," Derek counters. "I don't want to do that."

"You wouldn't be *tricking* him, Derek. Just withholding certain information. You can certainly tell him at any time, I just think it's best to let him get to know you before you drop the soulmate bomb on him."

Derek fidgets as he mulls it over. On the one hand, he doesn't want to have to resort to underhanded tactics to woo his mate. On the other hand, Peter isn't his mom's right

hand just because they're siblings. Peter has been giving Talia vital advice since before she was an alpha, to hear Derek's mom tell it. He even picked her outfit for her first date with Derek's dad. Also, Derek thinks there's something to be said for getting to know your mate before you jump right into a relationship. Maybe this is for the best.

Derek stands up. "Alright, say I do this. If I can't tell Stiles I'm his mate, what's my excuse for accepting his courtship in the first place?"

"I've already thought of that," says Peter.

Stiles is utterly baffled. Having to fake court his best friend was ridiculous enough, but to have someone else interrupt and accept his courtship before Scott can get a word in edgewise is beyond that. Stiles can't imagine he's *that* much of a catch. And for that interrupting idiot to be Derek Hale all grown up and almost unrecognizable because of the stubble and general sexiness—well. It's beyond Stiles's comprehension, really. It seems to be beyond the adults' understanding as well, if his dad and Alpha Talia's whispered conversation is anything to go by. They've been at it pretty much since Derek ran off into the woods and Peter Hale followed after him. Scott came over to talk to Stiles once all the commotion had died down, and told him exactly who this mysterious hot stranger was. Stiles just about fell over in shock, and has been laying on the grass ever since.

"This grass is nice and soft, Scotty," he says suddenly. "Maybe I should just stay here forever. Clearly when it's when I try and do things that everything goes wrong. I should just never do anything." Scott snorts and opens his

mouth to respond when Derek Hale comes running back out of the woods.

He must have lost his shirt at some point, because his chest is bare. Stiles is *very* appreciative of that. Derek is all sweaty and grimy from his run, and Stiles should not find it as hot as he does. Not when he's mad at this guy for elevating this situation from clusterfuck level to absolutely world-ending apocalypse level.

Derek walks over to where Stiles's dad and Alpha Talia are talking, and exchanges a few quiet words with his mother. Then he heads in Stiles's direction. Stiles rapidly moves to a standing position. He will *not* be intimidated by this brick wall masquerading as an extremely hot werewolf. He won't be turned on, either.

By the time Derek is right in front of him, Stiles has failed on both counts. Oh well. At least he has his dignity.

Abruptly, Derek says, "I'm Derek, Talia's son. Peter told me about your situation this morning, and I was worried that it might ruin your friendship for you to have to court Scott, so I accepted instead. I should've run it by you but there was no time. You'll have to court me instead. Sorry."

Stiles fights down the urge to laugh hysterically. First of all, Derek's voice is nowhere near as deep as his rockin' bod would suggest, and secondly, he's so terse it's like he's fighting a battle inside himself to get every word out. None of that's relevant right now, though. Stiles clears his throat. "Why would I have to court you? Can't I just do this again with Scott tomorrow? As a matter of fact, dude, mine and Scott's bond transcends mere friendship. We could absolutely have handled fake courting." Scott nods emphatically in support.

Stiles's dad steps in. "You started the process with Derek, son. Accident or not, it has to be completed with him, too."

Stiles groans. "Why is magic so fucking finicky? Fine, whatever. I'll start with the first step tomorrow. Give me your number." He holds out a hand for Derek's phone, but instead, Derek whips out a pen from god knows where, (Stiles doesn't want to *think* about where he got it, actually, considering all Derek's wearing right now is a ratty pair of jeans) takes Stiles's hand, and writes his number on his palm. It feels...somewhat nice, actually. Even if it was a rude thing to do. When Derek's done, Stiles rips his hand away, giving Derek an aggrieved look. But he can still feel the press of Derek's fingertips on the top of his hand, where Derek was holding his hand in place.

Derek steps back, and Talia pulls Stiles aside. "Sorry about all this, Stiles. Derek means well, he's just not the best with people that aren't family or pack. Look, step one is a formal meeting with the pack Alpha—that's me. You can come by whenever, and after the meeting we can talk plans for our werewolf rights crusade, if you're still interested."

"Of course I'm still interested! Your son's a doofus, but I still wanna help. Plus maybe I can look at some of your books on courting and courtship rituals while I'm here? Just to see how it's usually done, and if this sort of mistake is really unfixable, and stuff." Talia agrees, and Stiles heads off with his dad and Scott.

In the car, Stiles's dad laughs for five minutes straight. He trails off with a rueful shake of his head. "Only you, kid. Only you." Stiles wants to defend himself, but it's true. He's a magnet for ridiculous and uncomfortable situations. All he can do is hope that he can make this as fast and easy as possible.

At the Hale house, Derek smiles to himself. His mate is courting him. Derek is going to prolong the *fuck* out of this.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the comments and kudos so far! I'm glad people are enjoying this. The whole conversation with Talia Hale was inspired by a comment last chapter and sparked a whole politics subplot that may or may not go anywhere. Let me know how you'd feel about that in the comments. Or just comment on anything, lol. Hope everyone who cares about it had a good St. Patrick's Day and didn't go too wild. Also, I don't have a beta, so let me know if you see typos. See you next week, hopefully!

Cheeseburgers and Steak

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles would like to think that he's disconsolate. That he's deeply saddened and a little angry about having to pretend to court a random Hale wolf who is *bound* to make it awkward as shit, no matter what he says to the contrary. Stiles would like to pretend that he's full of righteous anger about this whole set of mostly-not-his-fault ridiculous circumstances, but honestly?

Derek Hale is really hot. Like, *really* hot. And he might have a point about Stiles courting Scott. Not that it would be awkward or ruin their friendship or whatever—as Stiles said before, they're *bonded*, they're basically brothers, but every time Stiles tries to even conceptualize thinking about Scott romantically, he ends up basically rolling on the floor, shaking with laughter. Which, reflecting on it, isn't really the best mindset to have going into a (fake) courtship. Stiles wouldn't put it past the ridiculousness that is magic to refuse to believe that *Stiles Stilinski* is trying to date *Scott McCall*. It just... doesn't make any sense. *Right*, Stiles thinks somewhat grumpily as he stumbles out of his car at the Hale house the next morning, *like me dating Derek Hale makes any more sense. There's no way I could bag a hot older werewolf.*

The issue is, no matter how ludicrous it may seem—and it seems plenty ludicrous—this is something Stiles has to do. He has to go in there and formally seek the Alpha's permission or whatever the fuck this meeting is for, and then he has to get started. He's planning on doing one step

a day, except today. Since the meeting with the Alpha is so short—she just has to approve it, and she’s the one who suggested this in the first place—Stiles is also going to do step 3 right after. He’s going to take Derek to McDonalds or something on his semi-official intern at the sheriff’s office paycheck, and he’s going to provide a meal. It’s going to be—well, not great. It’s going to be mediocre. But Stiles figures the sheer speed at which he’s getting stuff done is going to count as great for him and Derek, since neither of them really want to be doing this. Stiles has a whole plan for all the steps on the courtship list Talia gave him, which are:

1. Formal declaration of intended courtship
2. Formal meeting with the alpha
3. Giving of food
4. Providing shelter
5. Prolonged physical contact
6. Giving of a gift
7. A full moon run
8. Giving of food, providing shelter, prolonged physical contact, and the giving of a gift by the previous recipient
9. Formal declaration of accepted courtship by the courted party

Today Stiles knocks two and three off the list, if all goes well.

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Stiles should have known all would not go well. Oh, it all starts out fine, of course. Talia Hale is ever the gracious hostess. Derek Hale, however, is sort of wide-eyed in the back of the meeting room, and hasn’t said a word to Stiles since he started off strong with a “Good morning, Stiles,”

when he arrived. Looking at him, though, Stiles wonders if Derek's even breathing.

"Hey, are you breathing? Werewolves do have to breathe, right? Not breathing is, like, a vampire thing. And a necromancer thing, but that's just cuz bodies always smell really bad. I mean, not that I would know anything about that, uh..." Stiles scratches the back of his head. Derek snorts. Mentally, Stiles fist-pumps. Derek has a sense of humor! This might not be the death by boredom (and arousal, but nobody needs to know about that) that he thought it would be!

"I'm breathing," says Derek, in a very 'duh' sort of tone. "There's just no windows in here. So the smells are, uh, concentrated. Helps to breathe shallowly."

Stiles looks around the room, searching for the offending odor. There's not much in it today besides the usual, just a coffee pot and the three of them. "Do you not like the smell of coffee? Sorry, dude, but that's ridiculous. You're gonna have to suffer. I mean, I guess I could drink it all, if that would help." Because he has very little impulse control, Stiles does just that. There's only one cup left in the pot, luckily. Still, Talia and Derek look on in horror as he downs it in under a minute. At least, it's definitely horror—mixed with amusement, maybe—on Talia's face. Derek's face is kind of unreadable. His lip keeps twitching, though.

Stiles finishes, puts down the mug, and wipes his mouth with his hand. "Better?"

Derek just stares at him for a second, then says, "Yeah. Thanks." *Weirdo*, Stiles thinks.

"Okay!" says Stiles. "Let's do this thing! Uh, how do we do this thing?"

“You and Derek must join hands,” says Talia. “Then you ask me for permission. It’s simple really.”

Derek shuffles toward where Stiles is standing, looking apprehensive. *You started this*, Stiles thinks. *You better not back down*. Finally, Derek reaches out a hand, and puts it in Stiles’s. Almost immediately, his hand tightens, probably involuntarily. Unless he’s trying to keep Stiles from running away and prolonging this even more.

Derek’s hand is softer than Stiles expected, although still a little calloused. It’s warm, too. *Werewolves run hot*, Stiles remembers.

Stiles takes a second to compose the words in his head and get used to holding the hand of the hottest person he will probably ever hold hands with, then says, “Alpha Hale, I formally request your permission to court your son and beta of the Hale Pack, Derek Hale. Do you accept my request?”

Talia steps forward and clasps both hands around Stiles and Derek’s hands, and looks them each in the eye in turn. “I accept your request and give you permission to court my son and beta, Derek Hale. May the moon bless you and your love.” Almost immediately, there’s a whooshing feeling, like a blood rush, encompassing Stiles’s body. His hands tingle. Derek seems to be feeling it too, judging by the trembling of his hand in Stiles’s.

Stiles holds it in until everyone separates hands, but then he starts laughing. “Our *love*? I assume it’s, like, a requirement that you say that. Since everyone except us who’s doing this is in love and stuff. Right?”

“Right,” says Talia. Derek says nothing. Stiles is beginning to see a pattern.

--

After the official stuff is out of the way, Stiles and Talia talk politics for a little while. She gives him a few good Supreme Court cases to look up, and tells him that for now, his job is research. They'll work on next moves once they know more, and Talia has felt out some of her more powerful werewolf contacts for their opinions on reforming the all-human Pack and Human Contact Cabinet. Once that's done, (Derek, to nobody's surprise, spent the whole time standing awkwardly in the back of the room, saying and doing nothing as far as Stiles could tell) Stiles sweeps Derek out to his Jeep.

"So I figured we could try and do the food-providing step today, too, since the Alpha permission one was so easy. What restaurants do you like in Beacon Hills? Uh, that're in the McDonald's or In-N-Out price range, I mean."

Derek looks taken aback. "Uh. I guess In-N-Out? I like the shakes. The fries are bad, though. You really wanna do this today?"

"Yeah, dude," says Stiles. "I'm pretty sure you want to be tied to me as much as I want to be tied to you, so we should do, like, one step a day, if we can. This one's pretty easy, too. I just have to buy you a Double-Double and we can call it a day!"

Derek starts to lean on the side of Stiles's Jeep, then seems to actually take in its appearance and thinks better of it. "Is this thing safe to drive?"

Stiles is offended on his Jeep's behalf, and expresses it by lightly punching Derek in the side. He's unaffected, of course, but Stiles feels better. "Of course it's safe! You're going to grow to know and love this car during our

courtship, dude. Just you wait. Now, to In-N-Out!" Stiles gestures triumphantly, and gets in on the driver's side. Derek makes a few more dubious sounds, but gets in on the passenger side after a minute. Stiles cranks up the radio, and they speed downtown.

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In-N-Out is, predictably, crowded as hell. Stiles walks in and it's like a wall of sound hits him, so it's got to be worse for Derek and his sensitive wolfy ears. Derek enters behind him and takes two steps backward, like, nope. Not happening. Stiles grabs him by the arm and forcibly drags him inside. Well, Stiles would like to think it's forcible. He knows his own strength well enough to know that it is emphatically not. He's human, Derek's a werewolf, clearly if Derek's getting dragged it's because he's allowing it.

They get in line, and Stiles turns to Derek. "So, Double-Double, what else? Do you get it protein style? Cooked rare? Or just like, ask them to give you the raw ground beef that *would've* been in a Double-Double? What's our play here?"

Derek glowers at him. It's... very menacing, but Stiles isn't scared. He doesn't think Derek would hurt him, despite the leather jacket and the scowl and the bulging muscles and the douchebag Camaro, which all indicate otherwise.

Eventually, Derek says, "I like it well-done, actually. I prefer for my food to have no hint of having previously been an animal." Stiles buys it for a second, but then Derek's lip twitches, and Stiles bursts out laughing. He almost falls over, he's laughing so hard, but Derek catches him with an iron grip on his arm. *Better than around my waist like I'm a damsel in distress*, Stiles thinks, somewhat hysterically.

When he catches his breath, Stiles says, “You’re totally a rare burger type of man. I bet you catch squirrels in the woods on the full moon and just tear them apart. With your teeth.”

Derek raises an eyebrow at that, but doesn’t have time to retort, because they’re at the front of the line. The cashier asks for the order, and Stiles gets a Double-Double, two chocolate shakes, and a cheeseburger.

When they get their food, they head over to a small table in the corner. Stiles sits down and immediately starts swinging his legs back and forth. His foot connects with Derek’s leg, and Derek huffs at him but does nothing. He’s too busy inhaling his Double-Double. The second time, though, Derek takes action. His calves snap around Stiles’s foot and hold it there. Stiles makes an indignant sound.

“No more kicking,” Derek grunts. “I don’t trust you not to kick me again if I let go.”

That’s fair, but Stiles is still mad. “How dare you! After I bought you food and everything!”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Fast-food. That’s barely food, honestly.”

Stiles slumps in his chair. “Whatever. I don’t have the money for fancy restaurants so this is what you get.”

Derek perks up. “I could—”

“No, you *can’t* pay, dude. Then I’m not providing it, and it doesn’t count. Speaking of, I’m done, you’re done, are we done?” Stiles extracts his foot from Derek’s legs and gets up expectantly. He knows he’s being rude, but honestly, he just wants some time away from the ridiculous drama that

this thing has become. He wants to have a normal day playing video games with Scott or holding bags while Lydia shops or bothering his dad at the Sheriff's office with healthy snacks. He does *not* want to be hanging out with Derek Hale and his ridiculous silver-spoon palate, no matter how hot and secretly funny he might be.

Derek stands, too. He puts his hands in his pockets, looks down at his feet, and says, "Um. There's a magical element to courtship, as we already found out when I stepped in for Scott without asking you. The best I can describe it is that I subconsciously decide when I think you've completed a step. That's when we get that tingly, whooshing feeling, like in the meeting room with my mom. I don't think this worked."

Stiles is about to throw down. He is going to throw down with a werewolf next to the In-N-Out trashcans. "It didn't *work*? Why the hell not?"

It's possible he's screeching a little.

Derek shifts from foot to foot, almost as if he's nervous. Which is laughable, because he's *Derek Hale* and Stiles is Stiles. He's not threatening. Sure, he'd *like* to be, but he can't even get his four-year-old cousin to listen to him when he sees her at Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Finally, Derek says, "I guess just buying me a meal at a restaurant doesn't count as providing in my head or something?"

Stiles throws up his hands. "So, what? I need to go out into the Preserve and come back with a freshly slaughtered deer, which I then skin and cook in front of you on a spit in a fire I make myself using wood from trees I cut down with

my bare hands? Will that *count as providing* for you, Derek?"

Derek chokes on his last sip of shake and then starts laughing. Stiles joins him, because there's nothing wrong with finding himself funny. It's not egotistical at all. He just knows a good joke when he hears one.

"You don't have to go quite that far," says Derek. "Maybe just cook me something? Without catching the animal yourself and scavenging for the mushrooms in the Preserve or whatever you were about to suggest," he adds, giving Stiles a pointed look. Stiles shuts his mouth.

Stiles sighs. "Fine. You want to come over for dinner tomorrow? What do you like?"

Derek grins at him, and Stiles sees way too many teeth. "Meat," he says.

--

Stiles spends the next day relaxing, playing a friendly(ish) game of lacrosse with Scott and their teammates, and trying to ignore his looming dinner date. He can cook—sort of—so that's not what he's worried about. He just thinks it'll be monumentally awkward, or at least uncomfortable. He's not, like, good with people. Except, apparently, Talia Hale, who likes him for some inexplicable reason. But he has a very real history of annoying the shit out of werewolves, adults, and even his friends sometimes. He survived a ten-minute lunch at In-N-Out with Derek, but that might have just been dumb luck.

Luckily, Stiles has a master plan for making Derek not want to rip his throat out with his teeth. That plan is steak. Yeah, he's stereotyping a little, but he watched Derek eat a

Double-Double yesterday in literally four bites. Besides, he's good at steak.

--

Derek shows up at six on the dot and rings the doorbell. Stiles yells, "It's open!" because he's in the middle of trying to plate everything and would prefer that this night didn't end in disaster before it even starts. Derek comes in, takes a whiff of the smells of the kitchen, and actually cracks a smile. Stiles has never seen him smile before, and it's kind of blinding.

"You shouldn't leave the door unlocked," says Derek, immediately ruining the budding goodwill Stiles had for him.

Stiles turns around, brandishes a spatula at him, and says, "My dad's the sheriff and my best friend's a werewolf. People don't tend to break into this house. And they've all heard of that one time a guy *did* break in here, and I brained him with a baseball bat so hard that he actually reformed from practicing crime."

Derek raises an eyebrow. "That seems unlikely." He pauses for a moment, then says, "Can I do anything to help?"

"You can set the table. I think that's far enough away from food preparation that maybe your inner wolf or whatever won't refuse to accept this as a courtship step." Stiles points out where the placemats and napkins and silverware are, and Derek gets to work. Halfway through, he stops short.

"Oh!"

“What?” asks Stiles, turning away from seasoning the broccoli to look at Derek.

“I forgot something,” he says, and books it out of the house and back to his car, presumably. Stiles shakes his head, muttering to himself.

“If his steak gets cold, he’s getting a crappy microwave warm-up. I’m not putting it back in the pan.” He continues saying stuff about ‘inconsiderate werewolves’ and ‘spent an hour on this meal’ until Derek returns triumphantly two minutes later. He’s holding...flowers?

“Why do you have flowers?” Stiles asks. “You know this isn’t a real date. I mean, uh, thank you.” Derek holds them out, and maybe it’s hot in here because of the cooking, or maybe he’s actually embarrassed, but he’s blushing. There’s a light dusting of pink on his cheeks that continues down his neck, and presumably farther (not that Stiles is thinking about that).

“I just thought you might like them,” Derek says. “I know I wasn’t your first choice for this and I’m sorry the In-N-Out thing didn’t work out. So, flowers.” *Oh no. He’s not just hot. He’s cute.*

Stiles takes the flowers, and gives them a perfunctory sniff. Then another sniff, because they actually smell really good. Then he rustles up a vase for them and makes them the centerpiece of the table.

“Thanks, Derek. Um, we can eat now. I made—well, you can see it. Steak and potatoes and broccoli.” Derek grins at him tentatively and sits down.

“It looks good,” Derek says. Then he takes a bite, and says, “It’s *really* good, wow. How did you learn to cook like this?”

Stiles hastily finishes his bite and replies, "I can't usually cook like this. This is just my dad's favorite meal. I don't let him have it that often because it's not super healthy, so I figured when I do let him have it, it better be worth it. So I did a lot of experimenting—Scott enjoyed that, I think one night he ate like three steaks by himself, didn't even throw up after—and eventually I became the steak master you see before you." He waggles his fingers in emphasis, and Derek laughs, rolling his eyes.

"I wouldn't call you a master quite yet," says Derek. "You could probably learn some stuff from Peter. He's the Hale pack steak master."

"Oh, you wouldn't call me a master?" asks Stiles. He doesn't know exactly what's coming over him, but he leans forward on his elbows on the table and looks Derek in the eye.

"What would it take for *that* to happen?"

This time Derek flushes even harder, and squirms in his seat. Then he seems to gain some confidence, and says, "You'd have to earn it. We'll see."

Stiles is honestly delighted. This evening is shaping up to be way more fun than he thought it would be.

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The evening is fun enough, in fact, that after dinner, Stiles asks if Derek wants to stay and eat ice cream in front of a movie. Derek, apparently, has nothing better to do, because he says yes.

The movie is *Empire Strikes Back*, which Stiles has seen one million times, and so has Derek, surprisingly. Since he's seen it so much, though, it shouldn't be too shocking that he falls asleep in front of it.

When Stiles wakes up, he's so warm and comfortable he doesn't want to move. His pillow, in particular, is really warm. It's moving, too, a soothing rhythm that almost lulls him right back to sleep. It's only when he suddenly remembers what was happening before he fell asleep that he jerks upright. He was lying on Derek's chest, apparently. It had been surprisingly soft, considering how jacked he is.

"Whaaa?" says Stiles intelligently. Derek understands him, or at least takes pity on him, and explains.

"You fell asleep. Almost immediately. I moved your ice cream so it didn't spill on you."

Stiles kind of wants to run away, but he's in his own house. He settles for blushing furiously and apologizing. "Sorry, dude. Didn't mean to use you as a pillow. Hope you're not too traumatized."

"It was...fine," says Derek, sounding like he's forcing himself to be calm. "I actually think I'm the opposite of traumatized. You missed it because you were asleep—or maybe that's what woke you up—but it worked."

"What worked?" Stiles is basically still asleep. Or he wishes he was. Either way, his brain's not totally online.

"The providing of food. We completed another step."

Stiles jumps up from the couch. "Oh, awesome! Next up, I shelter you somehow! Now we're getting somewhere."

"Yes, we are," says Derek stiffly. He looks down at his lap for a few moments, then back up at Stiles. "I should go."

"Wait, but the movie's not even..." Stiles trails off when he looks over at the tv. The credits are rolling. "Never mind."

Yeah, you should probably go. I'll see you soon for the next step, though!"

"Yeah," says Derek. "See you soon." He heads out the door, leaving Stiles to shovel his mostly melted ice cream into his mouth and stare mindlessly at the credits of *Empire Strikes Back*.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait, everybody! I had less free time than I thought I would last week. Anyway, here we go, the courting process begins and Stiles and Derek really interact! It's all very thrilling. Hope you enjoyed, feel free to let me know in the comments!

Lacrosse Sticks and Badassery

Chapter Notes

yay! early chapter! i felt bad about leaving you guys hanging for more than a week last time, plus i was v inspired because this chapter has a fave scene of mine in it, so you get it a couple days early! enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Stiles may have been a little overconfident with his whole ‘we’ll do one task a day’ thing, because providing shelter is turning out to be a real bitch of a finicky concept. It’s been a week since watching *Empire Strikes Back* with Derek, and he hasn’t made an inch of progress.

Actually, Stiles reflects, he’s made a lot of progress. He’s learned what *not* to do in order to get Derek’s little wolfy subconscious to decide he’s been provided with shelter.

1. Don’t give him your jacket—and a ride—when it’s raining.

It’s the middle of the week and Stiles is cruising home from school in his car when he sees him. Stiles squints through the water beating down on his windshield (so he hasn’t managed to replace his busted windshield wipers yet, sue him) in an attempt to figure out if that’s actually Derek Hale, walking alone in the rain with a bag full of groceries. Stiles figures that even if it isn’t, that person could probably use a ride, so he pulls over.

“Hey, Derek! You good?” Derek jumps in surprise, turning around in midair. It’s surprisingly graceful. Almost looks like —“Did you take ballet lessons as a kid? I mean, you’ve got the leaps down pat.”

Derek actually growls. It's kind of amusing. Then, "Yes. For a year. Laura was doing it and I was at the age where I thought everything she did was the height of cool. I wasn't very good, though."

Stiles barks out a laugh. "Hey, get in, dude. It's like, bucketing out there. I wouldn't be surprised if it started raining men. God, that would be great..."

Derek glowers at him at that. "No thank you. I like the rain. It's," he looks around him, as if hoping an appropriate word will manifest itself, "refreshing. It's refreshing. You know, the water hitting your face and reminding you you're alive. That sort of thing."

Stiles thinks that he's never met someone less concerned with 'that sort of thing' in his life. But who is he to disbelieve Derek? Oh yeah, a dumbass human trying to provide shelter to an equally dumbass werewolf.

"Yeah, that's real believable. Look, do you want a ride or not?"

"Fine." Derek clambers into the Jeep, looking disgruntled to be back inside his least favorite death trap. As if to get back at Stiles for the Jeep's sheer existence, he shakes the water off his body in a way rather reminiscent of what dogs do when they're wet.

"Hey! My interior!" Stiles cries, grabbing a tissue and trying to wipe down the steering wheel, center console, and the passenger side of the dashboard. To get at the dashboard, he has to reach across Derek. Derek's hands twitch under his back, like he's gonna push him off with extreme prejudice or something. He doesn't though, just sighs, put-upon. "There, much better." Stiles pulls back over to his side of the car, and Derek shivers. "Are you cold? Ooh,

what if you have hypothermia? Can werewolves even get hypothermia? You better take my jacket just to be safe.” Stiles shrugs off the windbreaker he’s been wearing all day, and hands it to Derek. Derek takes it, looking at it like he’s never seen a jacket before in his life.

“I don’t think this will fit,” Derek objects. “I don’t think any of your clothing would fit me.” Stiles appraises Derek’s body and tends to agree. Derek’s got muscles that actually protrude from his body, while Stiles would say he’s more of a lean muscle kind of guy.

“It’s a size too big because that’s my dad’s whole philosophy when it comes to rain jackets. Makes them ‘extra waterproof,’ apparently.” Sighing, Derek puts on the jacket. He calms almost visibly, and drags part of it up to cover his face. Stiles assumes he’s hiding from the world. That’s fair, honestly.

The ride up to the Hale house is mostly silent and very bumpy. The rain has made some of the more questionable roads even more questionable and even less like roads. Stiles’s Jeep likes off-roading as much as the next guy, but it’s old and (dare Stiles say it) dinky. So Stiles feels a bit like he’s risked life and limb for this, when all is said and done.

When they get there, Stiles turns to Derek in the passenger seat and asks, “So have I provided adequate shelter, Your Wolfiness?” Derek emerges from Stiles’s windbreaker literally just to roll his eyes.

“I don’t think so. But thanks for the ride.” With that, he swings out of the car, groceries in hand, and disappears into the Hale house.

It’s not until Stiles is home, putting his backpack away, that he realizes he never got his windbreaker back.

2. Don't invite him into your house. He'll eat all your food.

Derek is having a bit of a bad day. First of all, the windbreaker he stole from Stiles no longer smells like him. His scent was washed off by a combination of the rain and Derek rolling around in it all night, reveling in his successful thievery. Secondly, all he can think about is how much Stiles doesn't seem to want to be around him. Sure, he stopped to give Derek a ride yesterday, but 1) he's a good person and it was pouring rain and 2) it was all just an attempt to check off another requirement on the courting list. Every time Derek sees Stiles, Stiles brings up that stupid list and how much he wants to be done with it, and although Derek gets where he's coming from, it's still pretty hurtful.

The only thing Derek has going for him is the fact that whatever part of his subconscious mind that's in charge of deciding when a step is completed seems to be very stubborn about it. It's basically the opposite of the rest of Derek, which wants to be easy for Stiles. *So easy*, Derek thinks. *He could do basically anything, and I'd consider it good enough.* It's a frightening thought, if Derek is honest with himself. Sure, he grew up hearing about mates and how wonderful they are and how great it is that there's one person you're guaranteed to meet at some point who is absolutely perfect for you, but he's always been a little wary. After Kate, especially. There's a part of him that can't come to terms with the fact that he's already in love with Stiles, has been since he first saw him—first smelled him, even. He's not really a head-over-heels person, and it's like this whole mates thing has changed that for him.

Of course, Derek can try and talk himself out of this instant love connection all he wants, but it doesn't change the fact that the more time he spends with Stiles, the more he recognizes the rightness of it all. Stiles is just enough awkward, just enough sarcastic, just enough kind and interesting and so many other good qualities that Derek would probably have fallen in love with him anyway, mate or not. Which, he supposes, is the whole *point* of mates.

Anyway—Derek's having a bad day. He had a super awkward conversation with his mother this morning when she caught him with the windbreaker (he was snuggling it in his sleep, and his mom came in to make him get up for family breakfast). The upshot of that particular clusterfuck is that he managed to avoid spilling the beans about the mate thing, but he had to compromise by saying he liked Stiles's scent. His mother raised a single eyebrow, (it's a werewolf skill) then hugged him and told him he 'didn't have to do this if it would be too hard.' Derek could just hear Stiles in the back of his head: "yeah, SOMETHING's gonna be too hard. wink wink." Of course, Derek does have to do it, because magic is dumb and this is his *mate*. If his mate wants to court him, Derek's going to let him.

After a supremely uncomfortable family breakfast in which it became very clear to Derek that Cora, at least, had ferreted out the Windbreaker Incident from his mother, Derek left for work. He works at an architecture firm in downtown Beacon Hills, and normally, he loves his job. Today, though, he has to have lunch with his least favorite client, who wants to meet at the most upscale restaurant in town because he's a money-grubbing idiot. Since it's upscale, the portions are basically one bite, which is like a quarter of a bite for a werewolf. Needless to say, Derek does not like that restaurant. Once he's gotten through that, Derek has to do a ridiculous amount of emailing and

paperwork about the client's requests, and then he finally gets to go home. Or so he thinks.

Derek hasn't checked his phone since before lunch, and when he turns the screen on just before he leaves work, he sees a notification from Stiles:

Stiles: Hey dude wanna come over and eat dinner at my house with me and my dad?

Derek smiles for a second before he sees the follow-up message.

Stiles: Since it worked last time, maybe it'll count as providing shelter!

Ugh. Derek sighs and responds with a quick 'fine, see you in twenty,' before getting into his car.

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The Sheriff answers the door at the Stilinski residence. He holds out a hand for Derek to shake and says, "Hello, Derek. Don't think we've properly met, since last time I saw you involved a little too much yelling for that sort of thing."

Derek grips his hand and replies, "Nice to meet you, Sheriff Stilinski. I've seen you around the estate. My mom appreciates all the work you do for us." The Sheriff smiles at that, and gestures Derek inside.

Stiles is in the kitchen, wearing a ridiculous apron that says "they see me rollin', they hatin'." There's an image of a rolling pin on it. Derek hates it immediately.

"Your apron is dumb," he says. Stiles sputters at him in indignation before he manages a response.

“Oh yeah? Well, you’re helping me with dinner, and I have an even better one for you.” He pulls out another apron, which says “Mr. Good Looking is Cooking.”

“That’s a monstrosity,” says Derek. He shrinks back from Stiles’s attempts to give it to him until he’s pressed back against the fridge. Making a triumphant noise, Stiles steps up right in front of him and forcibly puts the apron on him. His body is pressed up against Derek’s, every warm inch of him, and Derek is having a bit of trouble breathing. If there were any other werewolves here, he’s sure his scent would be incriminating. It only gets worse when Stiles reaches up to tie the apron around his neck, and his hands brush Derek’s pulse point. Necks are, as any werewolf knows, *very* sensitive, vulnerable spots on a werewolf’s body. The fact that Stiles has absolutely no qualms about touching Derek’s—and that Derek has no qualms about it being touched—is kind of a lot for Derek to process right now. Stiles’s fingers linger for a moment after the apron has been tied, and his breath fans over the side of Derek’s face. Derek wants to close his eyes and live in this moment forever. It’s probably the best he’s ever going to get.

Stiles steps back and says, “You’re on salad duty. I’m not letting my dad have spaghetti and meatballs without *something* healthy on the side. And,” he looks critically up and down Derek’s body, “I think you could probably use some veggies too. I mean yeah, you’re super cut and all, but I doubt werewolves get enough leafy greens.”

Derek agreeably shreds lettuce, chops tomato, and sprinkles goat cheese and dressing on top. Stiles finishes serving everything else as Derek does, and they bring it all over to the table. The Sheriff joins them, and they all dig in.

Dinner with the Stilinskis is an...interesting experience. They're both quick-witted, sarcastic men, bouncing off each other and speaking so fast that Derek has a little trouble interjecting. He still makes his opinions known, though, when he thinks the topic is important enough, like in the heated debate about whether police officers or FBI agents are cooler. That particular argument seems well-worn, like it's been brought up many times before. Upon hearing Stiles wants to be an FBI agent after college, Derek understands why. He weighs in with the contribution that they're such different jobs that they can't actually be compared, which seems to resonate with the Sheriff, at least. Stiles dismisses it with a wave of his hand and a "but then what would we argue about, Dad? Our relationship thrives on discord!" Here, Derek interjects yet again.

"It's like that in my family, too, especially with me and Laura. We're both pretty stubborn, so we're always arguing, but it's from a place of love." Stiles points his fork at Derek, emphatic.

"See? He gets me!" Stiles exclaims. Derek blushes. This is all he wants to do for the rest of his life. Well, maybe not *all*. There are certain activities he'd like to do that would not involve the Sheriff.

The rest of the evening progresses in the same vein, although they eventually move to the couch to watch a March Madness game. The Sheriff spends most of it yelling at the screen, as does Stiles, albeit for different reasons. Stiles clearly knows nothing about basketball, and obviously prefers annoying his dad by making up basketball facts instead. Like, a player will get a basket, and Stiles will yell, "Foul! That ref is *blind*, how can he not notice that number fifteen did a triple-dribble reverse backboard shot? That's illegal!" and then Stiles's dad will throw popcorn at him.

After a little while, Derek feels comfortable enough to do his own yelling at the screen. Mostly it's real yelling, like the Sheriff's, but once or twice he throws in a fake foul just to make Stiles happy.

He also eats all the popcorn in the house.

The evening is so nice, in fact, that Derek forgets the whole reason why he's there until he's leaving. As he's walking Derek back to his car, Stiles asks, "Did I miss it, or did this one not work as well?" and Derek feels himself deflate. Oh yeah. That's what this is all about.

"Yeah, it didn't work. Maybe it was too similar to last time."

Stiles slumps. "I'll get you next time, I guess."

3. Don't buy him a tent for his 'wolfy nights under the stars.'

4. Don't randomly throw your body on top of him when you see him at the park (he'll elbow you off and run away immediately).

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So basically, Stiles is all out of ideas. How is he supposed to provide shelter for a dude that already has his own house, doesn't seem to care about walking around in the rain, and emphatically does not support your attempts to physically shelter him from being seen by other people by jumping on top of him?

The answer, as far as Stiles sees it, is that he isn't supposed to. At least, that's what Stiles has concluded by Friday that week. He's on a night run around the Preserve, trying to

train for lacrosse season by running in the almost dark. He's carefully not actually stepping into Hale territory so he doesn't get eviscerated—it would be a verbal evisceration by his dad when the wolves on patrol escort him to the police station, but that's just as bad. As he runs, Stiles contemplates the struggles of werewolf courtship, and tries to convince himself that being almost a week behind his original plan isn't that bad.

He's so busy being all 'woe is me,' as Lydia would put it, that he almost doesn't notice the man in the woods. He's over the Hale boundary line, and as he's got a gun in a thigh holster, Stiles doesn't think he's a werewolf. Werewolves don't like to use guns if they can help it.

Before he can think better of it, Stiles steps forward, letting the rustle of leaves beneath his feet alert the other guy to his presence. "Hey!" he calls. "You're not from around here, are you? You just stepped into Hale land. Are you authorized to do that?"

The guy turns to face Stiles, and Stiles can immediately tell that he was *not* authorized to do that. He doesn't have any sort of badge on that would mark him as law enforcement or park ranger, and in addition to his gun, he has a taser strapped to his waist. It's not just any taser, though. It's the kind of taser Allison's dad Chris brought to school once, on Career Day. Then, he'd told the class to watch out for these tasers, which have especially high voltage and are designed to subdue werewolves. Only hunters use them, he'd said, because police officers consider them cruel and unusual, and they're not allowed to deal with rabid werewolves anyway. This man is a hunter.

Shaking, Stiles takes another step forward. "You're not supposed to be here. You should leave." He's hoping that

this is just some miscommunication, like this guy is visiting the Argents, or something, and wanted to meet with the Hales while he was in the area. Stiles knows better, though. If this was meant to be peaceful, this guy wouldn't be sneaking in through the least-patrolled part of the Hale border. He'd be introducing himself at the front gate, and he'd probably have brought Mr. Argent with him.

"Don't worry about it, kid," says the hunter.

"Funny," says Stiles. "That just makes me worry even more." He takes another step, and the hunter advances on him.

"This isn't your problem. You'd best leave while you can," he says.

"Whatever you're doing, it's an attack on the Hale pack, on innocent people. That makes it my problem," Stiles responds. He sounds confident, but inside, he's quivering. He's no match for a seasoned hunter. But he has to slow this guy down at least a little, so the werewolves on patrol might get here in time to see the hunter and realize he's probably a scout for a whole group of them. Since the patrollers haven't arrived by now, Stiles thinks the hunter's wearing some sort of scent-blocking device or paste. Stiles has always thought werewolves rely a little too much on their sense of smell.

The hunter seems to make up his mind and runs at Stiles. Stiles takes a second to thank their dumb code for the fact that he's not getting shot—hunters prefer not to kill humans, if possible—and then looks around wildly for a weapon. He comes up with nothing, and instinctively dodges the man's swing. That's when he remembers he's carrying his lacrosse stick in an attempt to get better at

actually running with it. His clumsiness, adorable as it (hopefully) is, does him no favors if he's running with a large stick in his hands. He fumbles with the stick to get it in a good position for swinging, and that's when he hears it: a sound not unlike a bullet striking a tree.

"You just shot at me! What happened to only hurting non-humans?" Stiles protests.

"That's for weaker hunters," his opponent responds, cocking the gun again. Stiles panics, and runs at him like an idiot. The hunter clearly wasn't expecting that, as he doesn't fire the gun. Stiles swings the lacrosse stick, connects with a very unfortunate part of the guy's anatomy, and he goes down. Stiles hits him on the head for good measure, and the hunter's out.

"Shit shit shit shit shit," Stiles mutters. "What do I do now?" Let someone else deal with this seems to be the obvious answer, plus he has to warn the Hales. So Stiles runs in the vague direction of the Hale house.

He's met by Derek and Talia Hale before he gets there, though. "Stiles? What's wrong? I could smell your panic," says Derek anxiously. He meets Stiles halfway and grabs him by the arms, running his hands up and down them as if to make sure Stiles is okay. It's very soothing.

Stiles pants, trying to catch his breath. Finally, he manages, "Hunter. Passed the border where I was running. Had one of those taser thingies, didn't look like a friendly. I knocked him out with my lacrosse stick. That way," he points in the direction he came.

Immediately, Talia howls, and several wolves come running. "Hunter," she says. "Unfriendly. He's unconscious as far as we know. Bring him back here for questioning and arrest."

"I'll call my dad," says Stiles, fumbling for his phone. After a second, Derek reaches into his pocket and gets it for him. He dials, and holds the phone up to Stiles's ear. Stiles explains the whole situation to his dad, who says he's on his way. Derek puts the phone back in Stiles's pocket, and Stiles mutters, "Thank you."

"No, thank *you*, Stiles," says Derek. "You saved us, you stood up for us. I'm proud to be fake being courted by you."

Stiles grins at him, exhausted. "I'm proud to be fake-courting you." Just then, the wolves and the hunter come into view. Derek looks over at them, and Stiles feels a sudden whooshing feeling. He makes a surprised noise. "Oh, is that all, Derek? I just have to beat off a hunter from infiltrating your pack lands to get you to feel like you've been adequately sheltered?"

Derek snorts. "I guess my subconscious is high-maintenance." Stiles guffaws, collapsing in hysterical giggles. Maybe he's more tired than he thought.

Talia, who'd been giving instructions to her betas and going over protocol with Stiles's dad, returns to Stiles and says, "Thank you, Stiles. That was a very brave thing you just did for us. And, if I play my cards right, it'll be good for our campaign, too. It might get you the right kind of publicity for you to start spreading the message." Derek shoots her a look, and Talia adds, "Not now, though. Now you need to go home and rest. I won't take any further steps unless you give me the okay."

"It's cool, Alpha Hale," Stiles says. "Go for it, just don't set up any interviews for, like, tomorrow morning or something."

"I wouldn't," she replies. "I'm pretty sure Derek would be very displeased if I did, anyway." Looking up at Derek, Stiles can see that. He was surprisingly worried about Stiles's well-being.

"Aww," says Stiles. "Do you care about me, Derek? I knew it, we're becoming besties!" Derek growls at him, but Stiles isn't even remotely threatened. Still high on adrenaline, he loops his arms around Derek and brings him in for a hug. It's warm, reassuring, and just tight enough. "You're a great hugger, Der-Bear."

Derek lowers his eyebrows threateningly at 'Der-Bear,' but otherwise makes no comment. Stiles leans back into the hug, letting Derek support most of his weight. Maybe this fake-courtship thing has its upsides, after all.

Chapter End Notes

bamf!stiles with a side of feelings! and derek pov since a commenter asked for it and i love comments/ am helpless to deny them

(Don't) Wake Me Up

Chapter Notes

chapter titles are a mistake i will not be repeating...
anyway, enjoy the new chapter! it's a little shorter
because the whole issue is a bit more straightforward,
but we continue to work towards getting somewhere

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So you used your lacrosse stick to knock out a hunter trained to kill *werewolves*?” The reporter lady crosses her legs the other way and leans forward in her seat. Stiles laughs awkwardly. He’s been doing a lot of that in the past week.

He clears his throat. “Yeah. But you’ve heard that part of the story already. Everyone has. Don’t you want something else?”

It’s true, everyone *has* heard the story already. Talia got Stiles an interview with the *Beacon Times* about a week after the incident, and the story was picked up by a rather more famous *Times* located in New York, and the whole thing went—well, not viral, exactly. Since there wasn’t an accompanying video to Stiles’s story about knocking a hunter the fuck out with a lacrosse stick to the head, (and balls) it didn’t have quite the ability to spread. But it still blew up, and now Stiles is doing an in-depth follow-up piece with *The New York Times*.

The reporter looks a tad affronted, which is probably Stiles’s fault. He’s not super great with interviews, and his experience with the *Beacon Times* was way more informal

(he and the editor-in-chief's high-school-age son met at Taco Bell, and Stiles shared the whole story through a mouthful of taco). This time, he's in a studio, with cameras facing him at all angles. He's in his best clothes, and he even combed his hair. Well, his dad combed his hair. Either way, it's way bigger profile. Stiles would think they'd want something fresh and interesting to make it worth a follow-up piece, even if he's a little rude.

"Yes, alright. Now, what *I* wanted to know, dear, is why you were near the Hale border and willing to risk your life for them. I got an inside tip from one of your classmates that you and one of the betas of the Hale pack are in love?"

Aha. This is what she's really after. I can work with this.
"I'm courting one of the Hale betas, yes. That attack actually checked off 'providing shelter' for us. But the way you phrased that question—like I wouldn't have been willing to defend the Hales if I hadn't been dating one of them. Where did you get that idea from?"

The reporter leans back in her chair, shocked. She gathers herself, then says, "I didn't mean to imply anything like that. Clearly, you feel strongly about werewolf rights—"

"Clearly not everyone does," Stiles interjects, "not if you thought you had to get me to tell your audience why I would bother stopping a hunter from *killing* all of them."

"It was one hunter, wasn't it? Surely one hunter wouldn't be able to kill off a whole pack."

"He was a scout," Stiles replies. "The Hales handed him over to the Hunter Council, who obtained information from him about his family's plans to take down the Hale pack."

The reporter raises her eyebrows. Stiles is thinking he should have paid attention when Talia told him her name. “That’s shocking,” she says. “Hunters are meant to harm werewolves that are a danger to others, and only after discussing it, with witnesses, with the pack in question. That’s why they have so much government immunity. We must hope that this family was an aberration.”

Stiles scoffs. “We can do more than that. We can more thoroughly investigate hunter families, so they’re all living by the Code the way the Argents do. We can give them less government immunity. Hell, we can give the human-run government less control over werewolves, and when they can be killed, and who can interact with their packs, and—well, everything else. Our government has a finger in every werewolf pie there is, and either that has to change, or the people in our government do.”

--

Stiles flops down on the couch at Lydia’s house. “I wish I hadn’t used that fucking metaphor. It’s so *fucking* weird.”

Lydia nods in agreement. “The graphics people are making alone—”

“The graphics!” he moans. “Don’t get me started on the graphics! Who knew fingers in pies could be portrayed so creepily!” Lydia arches an eyebrow and mutes the television, which is now playing a Honda ad.

“I thought it was cool,” says Kira. Stiles dismisses this immediately.

“You’re just super nice,” he says. “You’d never tell me if I did something dumb.” Scott opens his mouth, and Stiles

adds, "Neither would you, Scott. Now, Cora, on the other hand—"

"I think it's cool too. Not the metaphor, that was fucking idiotic, but the interview itself. Especially that last bit. You were really on a roll," says Cora, not even bothering to lift her head out of Lydia's lap.

"Really? *You* approve of something that *I* did."

Cora shifts position to look Stiles in the face. "I know, I generally prefer not to do that. But in this case, you're supporting my species in a surprisingly badass way. Also, Derek likes you. That makes two important people in my life who like you. Makes me think I should figure out what they see in you."

"Awww!" says Danny, obnoxiously. "Friendship at last!" Stiles rolls his eyes. It's moments like these that remind Stiles exactly why Danny and Jackson made such good friends before Jackson moved to London.

Allison clears her throat. "You really helped out my family too, Stiles. After all the Kate and Gerard shit, we were ostracized from a lot of hunter families. Either they thought we were tainted by Kate and Gerard or they thought we would be like them. Now we're getting a lot of calls from families that want to know why we got a shout-out in a *New York Times* interview."

That makes Stiles smile. The Argents are good people, and what Kate and Gerard did really messed with them. "I guess we're all in agreement, then. I'm the best." He raises a hand for a high five. Scott, as his best bro, obliges.

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With all the drama and commotion surrounding what has been branded “The Lax Attack,” (yeah, bad name, but Stiles didn’t pick it) Stiles hasn’t had much chance to talk to Derek, let alone get another step closer to being done courting him. It’s starting to stress him out. Stiles doesn’t want to be attached to Derek when Prom comes around, because what if he wants to take someone else? Would that count as cheating and nullify the whole courting bond? Stiles doesn’t know, and he doesn’t want to find out. So, even though he has a shit ton of homework tonight, Stiles texts Derek.

To Derek: Hey want to come over? We have to do some prolonged physical contact ;) ;) ;)

Derek replies almost instantly.

From Derek: Sure. Be there soon.

When Derek arrives, he looks jittery. Stiles would say he’s nervous, but that’s doubtful. Stiles is the least nerve-inducing person in the world. Unless the nerves in question are the ‘getting on your nerves’ kind. Either way, Derek keeps fiddling with his jacket as he sits on the edge of the couch, looking up at Stiles every few seconds and then quickly looking away.

Stiles sighs. “Is something wrong? Besides, like, the obvious part where you have to hug me for an hour or whatever.”

“It’s more than an hour.”

Stiles narrows his eyes. “Derek... how long is ‘prolonged?’”

Derek looks down, and mumbles, “Pretty long.”

Stiles moves over to sit beside Derek on the couch. “So a hug won’t do it?”

Derek laughs, but it’s a bitter, choked-off thing. Barely deserves qualification as a laugh. “No, not unless you often hug people for more than five hours.”

“Wha— Five *hours*? ridiculous! I don’t have time for that! I have homework!”

“Usually, this step is completed by sleeping together,” Derek offers. Stiles falls off the couch.

“I can’t—we’re not—I’m not having sex with you just to move another step closer to finishing this bullshit courting ritual! Not even if it saves your pack! Well, maybe if it was the only way to keep you all from dying. But it’s not on the table right now. What the fuck!” As he speaks, Stiles is basically crabwalking backward, away from Derek. Not that he thinks Derek would, like, attack him, but it’s better not to take any chances.

Derek rolls his eyes, presumably both at Stiles’s words and at his bizarre backwards crawling. “Literal sleeping together, dumbass. With cuddling. Assuming you sleep more than five hours a night, that tends to fulfil the requirement.”

Stiles collapses onto the floor and stops trying to scoot backwards. “Oh my god, *what* a relief. Not that I wouldn’t want to have sex with you, you’re super hot and surprisingly nice, but, um, not in a coerced, rapey way. Not really my vibe. Yeah, we can sleep together. Platonically. After I do my homework.”

“Oh,” says Derek. “Your homework. Well, I’ll just go, and you can call me when you’re ready for bed.”

“Are you stupid? You can stay, duh! I just won’t be great company for the next hour or so while I try to figure out who the fuck thought the Mexican-American War was a good idea.”

“I minored in history,” says Derek, as if that’s supposed to mean something to Stiles. Oh, wait, it does.

“So you can explain this to me? Great! I knew I kept you around for a reason!” With that, Stiles grabs Derek by the arm and pulls him upstairs, depositing him at his desk.

“Okay, sit. Now go, tell me everything you know about the Mexican-American War.” Stiles leans forward expectantly from his spot on the bed, notebook in hand.

--

Turns out Derek knows a lot about the Mexican-American War (“it was a bullshit land grab”) and is very good at presenting it in a way that keeps Stiles’s attention. He’s also surprisingly funny and sarcastic, just Stiles’s type. *Humor-wise*, Stiles thinks. *He’s my type humor-wise*. So Stiles whips through his homework, and is able to go to bed at a reasonable hour. Which wasn’t the plan at all. Stiles had hoped he would take so long getting everything done that they’d both be exhausted by the time they went to bed, therefore avoiding most of the awkwardness. *Nope. Just peak awkwardness, as usual.*

When faced with the prospect of getting into pajamas in front of Derek, Stiles bolts for the bathroom. He puts a t-shirt on, even though the early April weather is too hot for t-shirts usually. Stiles is not displaying his sad little not-chest in front of Derek the Buff History Nerd of his dreams. Derek, however, did not have a similar idea. When Stiles gets back into his room, the first thing he sees is—

“Abs. I mean—ok. Guess you’re going for the shirtless thing. Okay. That’s cool, you can do that. I’m gonna keep mine on though, if that’s cool. Uh, even if it’s not cool, probably. Um. Let’s just—do this.” Stiles lays down on the side of the bed nearest the door, closes his eyes, and waits for the dip in the mattress to announce that Derek’s on the bed too.

It doesn’t come. Instead, his duvet is thrown off him, and warm hands reach under his body to—move him to the other side of the bed? *Then* the telltale dip comes, and Derek lays down.

“Uh, dude? Why’d you—”

“I like this side. Go to sleep.” Stiles sputters for a second, but figures it’s not worth arguing about. Maybe it’s a wolfy den thing. As he contemplates, Derek rolls over, puts an arm over Stiles’s chest, and throws a leg in between both of Stiles’s. “There. Prolonged contact. Goodnight.” Clearly Stiles is being shut down, so he just rolls with it, and eventually, he falls asleep.

--

The next morning, they’re in much the same position, except for a certain bit of...movement. Humping, to be precise. A rolling of Derek’s semi-hard dick into Stiles’s clothed ass, to be even more precise. It’s kind of a lot for Stiles to deal with on a Friday morning, so he uses a bit of brute force to extricate himself from Derek’s arms (okay, a lot of brute force. Dude is strong, and surprisingly clingy) and heads to the bathroom. On his way there, he feels the characteristic ritual whooshing. Another step down. On his way back, he feels something else—a breeze, from the window in his room. The window’s open, and Derek’s gone.

--

Stiles bitches about the whole thing to his friends at lunch that day, earning an eyeroll from Lydia and a comment about sounding like a jilted lover, but by the end of the day, he has a plan. It's Friday, so he wouldn't normally be doing this, but he has no choice.

"Derek! Come help me with my homework!" Stiles yells, as soon as he's in the Hale house's entrance hall. The yelling probably isn't necessary because werewolves, but he's feeling obnoxious. Derek comes down a moment later, looking weirdly happy to see him after his whole disappearing act that morning.

"What do you want, Stilinski?" he asks, leaning (posing) against a wall.

"Essay on *The Great Gatsby*. Did you ever cover 1920s American culture in your history classes?"

Derek raises an eyebrow. "You're really here for homework help?"

"That's what I said," says Stiles, confused. "I mean, I guess I'm also here to hang out. We're friends, I figured you could make homework a little more interesting. So let's do it! Wait, maybe we should make a snack first..." he trails off, heading in what he thinks is the direction of the kitchen. Derek follows, smiling.

Chapter End Notes

let me know what you think!

Jarring Turns of Events

Chapter Notes

there's some derek pov in this one! hold on to your hats!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's half a month to the next full moon, and Stiles is feeling a bit...under pressure. He wants to be able to do the full moon run this month and have his part in this be over, but first he has to give Derek a gift. And nothing he's given so far seems to be working.

Stiles started out small, with a coffee he brought one day when he came over to wheedle a summary of the Civil War out of Derek. It took surprisingly little wheedling, maybe because Derek is used to it by now. Stiles goes to the Hale house almost every other day to get Derek's help with homework—alright, fine. He's not fooling anyone. He likes hanging out with the guy, is that so wrong? Stiles thinks they're definitely friends, at this point. He only says 'thinks' instead of 'knows' because he hasn't actually *asked* Derek if they're friends, for multiple reasons. Firstly, because he feels like having a 'what are we' conversation is bad enough when you're trying to date someone—it's just dumb to do it for a friendship.

Secondly, because he's afraid Derek will say no.

But on to happier things! Stiles tells himself. Happier things are actually plentiful right now. Stiles has become a bit of a minor celebrity, what with the whole 'knocking a hunter the fuck out and then calling out the entire government in an

interview' thing. The lady who runs the coffee shop he goes to keeps giving him free coffee because of it. (Maybe that's why the extra coffee he brought Derek didn't work. Stiles didn't have to expend any effort to get it, except juggling two coffee cups and trying to open his car door at the same time. Which can take significant effort.) The second thing to be happy about is that he's actually *started* something with that interview—the *Times* asked Talia for a comment since she actually *is* a celebrity, and she got people really fuckin' fired up. There have been, like, marches and stuff. And just recently, the Committee for Pack-Human Relations released a statement, showing their support for the movement and pledging to start changing laws and getting more werewolves in government. So in one sense, everything is coming up Stiles.

In another sense, everything is going wrong. Well, not *everything*, but everything Derek-related. Stiles's gifts keep failing, and Derek's starting to get a little huffy with him.

"You seem unhappy, nephew," says Peter. Derek heard him coming, but he still doesn't turn around.

"I *am* unhappy, so that's probably why. Why are you here?" he asks, staring moodily at the forest around him. He's on the same log he sat on when Peter convinced him to get into this mess. Maybe it's fitting that he's sitting here contemplating telling Stiles the whole truth.

Peter sits down next to him. "Your scent of sadness is practically suffocating. I thought I was going to drown in it, so I figured I would come cheer you up."

Derek almost laughs. Peter's never been the sort of uncle to want to cheer someone up. He must have other motives.

Derek says as much, and Peter looks affronted.

“Derek! I would never! I mean, I would. But in this particular case, I would never. Your entire life’s happiness is on the line, and—”

“Don’t fucking put it like that, Peter!” Derek stands up so fast he actually hears his heartrate increase to compensate. “I’ve been thinking about that all day and I don’t need you ‘cheering me up’ if this is how you do it!”

Peter sighs, and follows as Derek starts walking swiftly back to the house. “I don’t mean that it’s on the line, necessarily. What, you think Stiles would say no? He’s proven that he’s okay with us and our rituals, enough that he’ll fight for us on something that’s going to be broadcasted nationally. I actually think you could tell him now.”

Derek whirls around. “No I fucking can’t! You know why? Because you told me not to tell him from the beginning, and if it comes out now—”

“What? What happens if it comes out now? Look, he’ll be *happy*—”

“You don’t know him at all,” Derek says, furious. “He—we’re *friends* now. But even as friends, he still doesn’t fully trust me. For God’s sake, he thought I was gonna make him have *sex* with me just to get through another step of the courting ritual! And he was disgusted by even the concept of having sex with me! Which, maybe that was just because he thought it was, like, coercive. Which it would’ve been if that’d been what I was trying to do. But I just—I really don’t think I can tell him. He’ll feel like I’ve been using him.” Derek has reached the house at this point, and he slumps down on the steps. The sun is warm, and it’s a beautiful day, and he’s never felt worse in his life.

Peter is silent for a long moment, then reaches down and messes up Derek's hair. "Well, that sounds like a clusterfuck. You really dug yourself quite the hole there, Derek." With that, he walks into the house, leaving Derek to alternate between planning an elaborate murder scene involving smashing Peter over the head with that log from the Preserve and thinking about what he's going to do when this courting ritual is over. *Maybe if I just keep prolonging it*— Derek rejects that idea almost immediately, because yeah, he's prolonging it, but not consciously. Stiles is just really bad at gift-giving.

It started with a coffee made the way Derek likes it, which Stiles gave Derek as a bribe for tutoring him about the Civil War. At first, Derek had been pretty happy about that, because it meant Stiles was *thinking about him*, but then he saw Stiles's expectant, and then disappointed, face. The fact that Stiles had only bought the coffee as a way of fulfilling the 'gift' step of their courting process had killed that particular buzz.

A few days later Stiles showed up with a flatscreen tv, of all things. Derek had outright rejected that one, on the basis of it being too expensive for a high school student to be buying anyone. Plus, the Hale house has plenty of televisions. And Derek has a laptop and a Netflix subscription, so what more could he need?

After that followed a week in which Stiles did nothing but gripe about the fact that 'my presence should be enough of a present' and 'I don't even have a Christmas list to go off of,' complete with staring daggers in Derek's direction. Derek's response to that was mostly stoic silence and hurrying Stiles off of the Hale estate so Derek could mope. Turns out whatever part of him knew Stiles was his mate also got very unhappy when said mate was mad at him.

Eventually, Derek actually gave Stiles a list of things he wanted. Stiles diligently went out and bought every one, and Derek hated every. second. of it. It was all just Stiles doing it because he had to and only buying things Derek had actually told him to get and it just—made him sad. What Derek liked about getting gifts wasn't necessarily the gifts themselves, but the fact that someone saw something and thought he would like it, or put time and effort into figuring out what he wanted. Which, maybe that was cliché, but it was cliché for a reason.

“You need a break, dude,” said Scott, barging into Stiles’s room at 8 am the Saturday before the full moon. Stiles had been somewhat obsessively scrolling through Amazon, trying to find a gift for Derek that wouldn’t be the actual worst. But everything seemed dumb, and Stiles didn’t want to do dumb in the face of everything he’d already tried.

Stiles spun around in his spinny chair to face Scott. “My dad has got to stop just letting you in here,” he says. Scott grins, and holds up a key.

“We both know I’ve had this for literal years, dude. When are you gonna give up the ghost on that joke?”

“Never, probably. Now, about that break...”

Scott perks up and smiles even wider. “Yeah! I was thinking day trip to San Francisco! You, me, death-defying drives up almost vertical hills in the Jeep? Plus Ghirardelli Square, it’s the perfect combination!”

Scott’s enthusiasm is, of course, infectious, and Stiles gives in pretty quickly. San Francisco is only an hour and a half from them with no traffic, and Stiles is feeling lucky.

The drive simultaneously flies and crawls by. It flies because talking to Scott is always fun, but it crawls because the topic du jour is a blip in Allison and Scott's sex life that Scott desperately needs help solving, and Stiles desperately does not want to help solve. He manages to avoid it pretty neatly by telling Scott that if he wants to be in an adult relationship, he should be able to fix things himself. It's bullshit, of course, because everyone relies on other people, but it gets Scott thinking long enough for him to figure out a solution on his own.

It's still morning when they get to San Francisco, cold enough that Stiles feels the immediate need to find a hot beverage to wrap his hands around like he's Monica on *Friends*. That step completed, they wander around Chinatown for a little while until Stiles remembers the fortune cookie factory, which he's always wanted to visit.

It's tucked away in a little alley and absolutely does not look like it's an actual place when they get to where Google Maps directed them, but Scott can smell the fortune cookies, so in they go. They both eat probably more than their fair share of the unused scraps as they watch, wide-eyed, at the process. It's mesmerizing, watching the shaping of the dough and the gradual shift to a golden-brown color and the delicate placement of the fortune. They stand there for a good ten minutes before Scott nudges Stiles excitedly.

"Dude, look! You can make your own!" He points to the strips of paper where you can, indeed, write your own fortune and ask for it to be put in a cookie. It's relatively inexpensive, so Stiles goes for it. He makes one for his dad, (eat your vegetables) one for Lydia (the Fields Medal is coming for you), and, on a whim, one for Derek.

The rest of the day is just the relaxing mini-vacation Stiles (and, he suspects, Scott) needed. They goof off at Ghirardelli Square and are almost thrown out for breaking about a hundred chocolate squares trying to fit them in a “all you can fill” flat price box, they try the food trucks on the shore, and they race across the Golden Gate Bridge. Everyone yells at them, and Scott wins easily, but it’s the best day Stiles has had in a while, maybe since that day Derek had dinner with him and his dad. *Huh. I wonder—* Stiles shakes that thought off before it can get too far. He can’t be doing anything stupid right now, not so close to the end. Derek is counting on him to get this done quick and free both of them.

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Stiles is exhausted when he gets back. He barely has the energy to enjoy the look on his dad’s face when he opens his fortune cookie after having Chinese take-out for dinner and sees Stiles’s message. Well, that’s a lie, he definitely has the energy to enjoy that. He takes a picture, actually, and posts it on his Instagram. Deputy Parrish asks if he can use it for the police department’s website, and Stiles agrees, of course, though he’s sure he’ll be in for it when his dad sees it.

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The next day, Sunday, Derek comes over to Stiles’s house. He says he has something he wants to talk to Stiles about. Stiles lets him in, then remembers the cookie. “Wait, I have something for you! Gimme a minute.” He dashes upstairs, and returns to the kitchen table with the fortune cookie in its little mini carry-out box. “Here.”

Derek takes it, looks inside, and raises an eyebrow. "Okay, it's a fortune cookie. Thanks? Uh, should I eat it now?"

"Totally! I mean, uh, if you want to." Stiles leans forward to watch. Derek opens it, devours the cookie, then reads the fortune.

"Thanks for the homework help, Your Wolfiness. Wait, what?" He looks up at Stiles, confused. Stiles grins.

"I was at the fortune cookie factory in San Francisco with Scott and there were make your own ones. I made one for you and Lydia and my dad. Isn't it cool?"

Derek smiles at him. "Yeah, it's...really cool. You didn't make any for anyone else?"

"I couldn't think of anything to say for anyone else. Plus Scott was right next to me so I couldn't do one for him. And I've decided to make 'Your Wolfiness' your friendship nickname."

"My...friendship nickname," says Derek, drily.

"Like a pet name in a relationship, but for friendship instead!" Stiles bounces on his seat, and almost misses the whooshing feeling that runs through him. "Wait, was that —"

Derek looks almost bashful. "Yeah. I think it was."

"Great! You're one step closer to getting rid of me! You excited?"

Derek looks down at the table. "Uh—"

Stiles remembers Derek's initial reason for coming by and interrupts him. "Wait, so what did you want to talk to me about?"

Derek is silent for a minute, then says, "This, actually. This step was taking a while and I was going to try and give you some advice. But I guess it all worked out."

"I guess it did," says Stiles.

"I'll just leave then," says Derek, turning towards the door. "The next step's the full moon run, on Wednesday night. I'll see you then?"

"Yeah, totally! Wait, do you wanna stay for dinner?"

Derek doesn't turn around. "Thanks, but no. I need—I need to be alone right now."

Stiles nods wisely. "Ah. A wolfy night run. Well have fun, your wolfiness. I'll see you in a couple days!" Derek laughs and all but runs out the door.

Chapter End Notes

hope you liked this one! let me know your thoughts :) I feel like the Stiles parts and the Derek part were...way different in tone. IDK if that worked, so let me know. it might have been too jarring (the title of the chapter kinda betrays my thoughts there lol). See ya next week! it's gonna be a good one. I'm pumped for it!!

Truth Comes in Many Forms

Chapter Notes

Sorry I'm a day (or two) late! On the bright side, this chapter is rather longer than most of the others. Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On Wednesday morning, Stiles wakes up feeling... nervous. There's a couple reasons for this. The first is that he hates running. Well, he doesn't hate it per se, but he's not very good at it. Especially compared to a whole bunch of super-powered wolves. So if nothing else, he'll probably embarrass himself in front of the entire Hale pack, just by how slow he's running. He's already dreading the fact that they'll probably all have to run way slower just to keep him actually in the run.

The second is that, well, wolves are notoriously dangerous on full moons. That's why they stay on their own territory and run most of the night—they're liable to attack anyone who's not pack or their mate. Scott keeps telling Stiles that he's 'smelling more and more like pack' (this is usually accompanied by a deep sniff of Stiles's hair, and is supremely uncomfortable for everyone involved), but Stiles isn't sure that it'll be enough. Obviously, humans who aren't pack yet have done this part of the courting process before without dying, or it wouldn't have been included in the first place, but Stiles has this sneaking suspicion that somehow *this* will be the moment when the magic involved will recognize that his intentions aren't 100% werewolf-marriage-motivated.

When he gets to school, Stiles tries bringing this up with Scott again, who brushes him off. “Dude, it’ll be fine. Derek and I’ll protect you...probably.”

“Oh, probably! That’s super useful, Scotty. Who’s to say you won’t turn against me? I’m not your family and I’m certainly not your mate!” Stiles slams his locker door shut for emphasis.

Scott narrows his eyes. “Of course you’re my family! I know we’re not blood relatives, but—”

“Blood relatives seems to be the only thing werewolf magic trusts! So excuse me if I’m a little skeptical—”

“Why don’t you just talk to Talia?” says Lydia. Both boys jump. Even with werewolf hearing, nobody is ever able to hear Lydia coming. Except Cora, maybe, but even that’s hit or miss.

Stiles leans against the lockers. “Talk to Talia... About what? My fear that my best friend and her son are gonna tear me apart, or at the very least, not stop the rest of her pack from tearing me apart?”

Lydia ignores his sarcasm completely and says, “Yes, exactly. You should have a backup plan in place in case your fake courtship doesn’t cover it. I’m sure we would all prefer it if you weren’t mauled by wolves tonight.” She raises an eyebrow imperiously. Stiles takes a second to wonder why everyone he knows seems to have that skill, except him.

--

Turns out Lydia was, as usual, right. Stiles shows up at the Hale house right after school, hours before the full moon run is supposed to start, and Talia greets him at the door.

“Stiles! I was just about to call you when I heard your Jeep coming. Its engine has a very...distinctive noise.” *Like mother like son*, Stiles thinks grumpily. *Nobody respects the Jeep.*

He follows Talia into the house. “Why were you about to call me?”

Talia waits to answer until they’re safely in the meeting room. “Now that the full moon run is actually upon us, I’ve realized that it might actually be quite dangerous for you. Usually this step of the courting process works out just fine, because the pack member in question will protect their mate, but Derek—”

“Is only doing this out of the goodness of his heart? Yeah, I realized that too. The goodness of his heart isn’t gonna get us very far when he’s in wolf form, will it?”

Talia starts—well, Stiles wouldn’t call it pacing, exactly, because she’s too dignified for that, but it’s basically pacing. “It’s quite likely that it won’t. You never know, of course, as this situation is rather unprecedented, but better to be safe than sorry, yes?”

Stiles nods. “Yeah, I’d prefer not to be eaten by wolves if at all possible.”

Talia laughs. “We wouldn’t *eat* you, Stiles, just run you off. In a way that would show little concern for your well-being.”

Stiles slumps down a little further in the chair he’s claimed as ‘his’ after having numerous meetings in here with Talia, working on their political stuff. “So, werewolf pepper spray? Is that a thing?”

Talia sits down opposite him and takes a deep breath. She looks...sad, all of a sudden. "Yes and no, Stiles." Stiles makes a 'go on' gesture when her pause has moved from dramatic length to full-stop length. She blows out a long breath, and continues. "The, ah, werewolf equivalent of pepper spray would be mountain ash. Wolfsbane, as it is also known. But it can only be truly successfully wielded by certain types of people."

"What people?" Stiles asks, when Talia again seems to be done talking.

"People like your mother. And as my son would have it, people like you."

Stiles pushes his chair back and stands. "What? My mother—what would she have to do with this? With *any* of this? She was just a normal human! She *died* a normal human!"

Talia puts her head in her hands for a second, then looks Stiles straight in the eyes. "Human, yes. Normal, no. Your mother was a Spark, a natural magic-user. She worked with my pack in that capacity, actually."

Stiles takes several steps back, reeling. He'd known his mother worked with the Hale pack, of course, but he'd thought it'd been in a bureaucratic capacity. Like as an office worker. Not as a—a fucking *magician*. He takes a second to try and calm his emotions, but he can't—he's too —

"Why didn't you *save* her! If she was your fucking magic employee you should've fucking *saved* her! She was *dying*, of a disease that's been *proven* to be curable by the Bite! I thought maybe she was just so low on the totem pole that you never even knew, and she never asked—Dad told me she never asked—but if she was a *Spark*? That's pretty

damn high on the totem pole! You saw, you *saw* and you didn't care!"

Talia lets him get it all out. When he's done yelling, he curls up next to the wall and starts to sob. He doesn't have the energy to leave right now, even though he really wants to. He doesn't even have the energy to scoot away when Talia comes up to him and lays a hand on his shoulder.

"Stiles, I—there was *nothing* I wanted more than to save her. But Sparks are immune to the bite. They and banshees are the only supernatural creatures who can't become werewolves. There was nothing I could do, honey." She kneels down next to him and holds her arms open. Stiles turns blindly into them. He needs someone to hold him right now.

--

After Stiles finished crying and apologized to Talia for mistakenly blaming her ("No, honey, *I'm* sorry. This should've come up a long time ago. Only nobody knew you were a Spark and I didn't want to burden you with this if you didn't have to know") she explained the uses of mountain ash to him. She actually gave him a little bottle of werewolf pepper spray, which apparently was activated by pressing the button at the top and willing it to work. Armed with that and a jar of straight-up mountain ash in case he needs to make a protective circle, Stiles feels way better about the run tonight.

By the time that whole thing is done, there's only about an hour until the run, but Stiles heads home to get a quick pep talk from his dad instead of just hanging around the Hale house. Sure, he knows he's welcome—Derek, at least,

usually looks happy (or at least, not *unhappy*) to see him, but after what he found out today, Stiles just wants his dad.

--

Luckily, Papa Stilinski has the night shift tonight (a full moon means all hands on deck, because it's not just werewolves who get in touch with their wild sides on nights like this) so he's home when Stiles comes in. He takes one look at Stiles and pulls him in for a hug. When they separate, he asks, "What happened, son? I won't ask if you're all right, because that would just be—"

"Dumb, yeah. Cause I'm clearly not okay. Um, I went to talk to Talia about being safe during the run tonight, and she told me about—about, um, Mom. Being a Spark. And me being one too, I guess. Which means I can use this tonight if anyone crosses me." He holds up the little pepper spray bottle and laughs wetly.

Stiles's dad guides them both onto the couch and puts an arm around his son. "I thought I would get away with not telling you about that until you were older, because Deaton said that Spark powers usually manifest around age 11."

"That's very Harry Potter," Stiles observes. "Maybe J. K. Rowling knew a Spark or two."

"I don't doubt it," says his dad. "What I mean to say, though, is that I didn't want you to feel bad about not having that part of her. I would've told you before you had your own kids, of course, but I guess I was just—putting off a painful conversation for another day, and another day, and another day."

Stiles sighs. "Thanks for, uh, protecting me, I guess, Dad. But if you're hiding any other life-altering secrets from me,

now's the time. I'm not really in the frame of mind to be forgiving about that sort of thing."

His dad laughs. "Nothing else, kid. You already know Santa's not real, so I got nothing."

Stiles laughs and hugs his dad again. "I love you, Dad. I'm gonna kick ass tonight so you can focus on arresting dumb humans who think if they commit crimes tonight it'll get blamed on werewolves."

His dad rubs his back for a second and then lets go to smile at him. "Proud of you, kid. Your mom would be too."

"Yeah she would! She was always the one encouraging me to be a superhero, and now I really am one!"

"You always were."

Stiles sniffles. "God, Dad, that's so sappy. I'm gonna leave before you make me cry again and I lose all my street cred with the Hale pack." He stands up to head to the door.

"What street cred?" Stiles's dad messes up his hair and sends him off to ~~his doom~~ the werewolf full moon run.

--

When Stiles gets there, he's immediately mobbed. Well, mobbed might not be the right term for it, since it's only three people, but they're strong enough and enthusiastic enough for it to feel like a mob. At least, Derek and Scott are enthusiastic. They both run up and hug him. Cora runs up and then hangs back, until Derek says, "Stop being dumb, Cora. We know you want in on this hug," at which point she joins in, looking like she's breaking several of Derek's ribs with the force of her hug.

“This is a good sign, right?” asks Stiles. “You guys aren’t trying to kill me yet? Except with like, love? On that note, Scotty, get off me. I can’t immediately heal my ribs if you crack them.”

Derek pulls Scott off Stiles and shakes him like he’s a misbehaving puppy. It’s very entertaining to watch. Then he addresses Stiles’s question. “It doesn’t mean anything, really. It’s when the moon fully rises and we all turn into our wolf form that we’ll get violent towards outsiders. But I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“Oh, cuz your mom gave me this thingy?” Stiles holds up the mountain ash. “Yeah, I’m hoping it doesn’t come to that, because we need to complete this step, but I’m willing to use it if necessary.”

Derek opens his mouth, closes it again, and finally says, “Yeah. I mean, I think it’ll probably be fine anyway, but yeah. Because of the mountain ash.” He stalks over to the assembled group of Hales, and Cora follows, leaving Stiles with Scott.

“You ready to defend me against legions of werewolves, dude?” Stiles waggles his eyebrows at Scott meaningfully.

“That’s not really how it works, Stiles. As long as one wolf in the pack accepts you, nobody else is gonna attack you. So it’s basically all or nothing. I’m sure you’ll be fine, though.” With that, Scott claps Stiles on the back and joins the rest of his pack. They’re lining up in some sort of formation, wolves and humans alike, so Stiles jogs over to Derek to ask what he’s supposed to do.

“So how does this work, exactly? Where do I go? Am I expected to run as fast as you guys?”

Derek laughs. "We line up according to our rank. That's why I'm so far ahead of Scott." He honest-to-God puffs out his chest at that, making Stiles burst out laughing. Then he realizes maybe he shouldn't be doing that, because this is a formal occasion, but he can't stop himself, so he buries his face in Derek's t-shirt until he calms down. It smells good, if a bit sweaty. Derek says nothing throughout all this, although he's absolutely trying to communicate something with his eyebrows that Stiles can't parse quite yet. When he's calmed down, Stiles steps back, and Derek continues. "As for you, you're acting as my mate in this run, so you run alongside me. And no, you don't have to run as fast as us. We tend to run slower at the beginning, with the humans, and we'll all break off at some point. I'll come find you at the end of the night if you haven't found your way back."

"What a relief," says Stiles. "I thought I might be stuck in the woods forever. You would find my desiccated corpse years later and cry over it."

Derek raises an eyebrow. "Knowing you, that's absolutely possible, so be lucky I'm willing to rescue you from that prolonged, untimely demise." Stiles is about to retort, cuttingly he's sure, when Talia turns to face her pack and everyone shuts up. Even Stiles can read a room when it's projecting as strongly as that, so he shuts up too.

Talia gives a little speech about the wonders of the wolf form and about not killing any innocent humans. It appears to be one everyone's heard before, as Stiles can see Cora actually mouthing the words along with her mother. Then Talia wraps it up with a long howl. It's echoed by the rest of the pack, making the hair on Stiles's arms stand on end. And then.

And then.

All the wolves take off their clothes, which Stiles probably should've expected, since they were all about to turn into actual wolves. Maybe he'd just blocked it from his imagination completely.

Well, all the wolves except one take off their clothes. Derek nudges Stiles and says, "I have to—you know. I don't want to make you uncomfortable, so I can go undress in the woods if you want."

Stiles waves a hand. "It's fine, dude. It looks like that would mess up the whole routine of this thing, anyway. I'll just look away—oop, not that way. Or that way. I'll just close my eyes until you're all wolves." And he does just that.

He probably would've stood there for a good ten minutes, trying to avoid seeing a single naked body part, but then he starts hearing it. A cacophony of wolf noises—yipping, barking, a howl or two. He also feels something soft against his side, which turns out to be wolf Derek when he opens his eyes. Stiles grins at him. "Hey, bud. Guess you don't hate me in this form! That's good news I guess." Derek barks (happily? Stiles can't really tell, but he's not getting murdered, so probably happily) and pounces on him. For a white-hot second, Stiles is scared, but all Derek seems to want to do is give him a tongue-bath, which is fine. Well, not *fine*, because it involves an ungodly amount of saliva, but it's strangely nice for all that.

After what feels like ten minutes of that, but was probably only one, Derek lets him back up. Stiles staggers to his feet and tries to surreptitiously wipe wolf drool off of his face. Derek yips at him in reprimand.

Another wolf comes bounding over, almost reigniting Stiles's fear even though nobody else seems to be paying

attention to (or trying to attack) him, but he figures out it's Scott when he sees his eyes. They're not the same, exactly, but they have the same emotion behind them that human Scott's do. Scott gets right up next to Stiles, sniffs his face for a second, and takes two steps back. He and Derek have a furious bark-off (like bake-off! Stiles is hilarious) that culminates in Scott brushing his back underneath Stiles's hand and then running off. Stiles wants to ask Derek about it, but Derek isn't going to be at all forthcoming in this form—or any form, really—and at that exact moment, a long, loud howl rings out. It's unmistakably Talia's. All the wolves echo it, and they all start to run.

Apparently, running can be fun if you're doing it with a whole bunch of overexcited wolves. They're all a huge mass of fur and skin, in the humans' case, and Stiles and Derek are in the middle of it. After a few minutes, though, a lot of the wolves put on the speed and leave the humans and their wolves behind. Stiles takes that to mean he can slow down from a dead sprint to a light jog, and Derek adjusts to stay next to him. They don't make much progress in terms of distance after that, both because they're running so slowly and because Derek likes to stop rather often to tackle Stiles. He especially likes it when Stiles is running in front of him. Maybe it reminds him of his predator hindbrain, Stiles isn't sure.

Once the moon is at its zenith, Derek pushes Stiles up against a tree and communicates to the best of his wolfy ability that Stiles should stay there. Stiles isn't about to argue, because he's not really cut out for hours upon hours of running. So maybe he's just pretending that's what Derek wants, but Derek doesn't try to pick him back up when he collapses, back against the tree's trunk, so he's probably right. Besides, they already felt the courtship magic—it was clearly satisfied by a very straightforward

moon run—so Stiles has done his part. When Stiles is settled, Derek gives him one last lick and bounds off into the woods.

--

Stiles wakes up to darkness and a lot of licking. Based on his watch, it's only been about an hour, but he feels pretty energized. That is, until he smells the rabbit.

He tries to scoot backwards, but there's a tree in the way. He scoots sideways instead, as far as he can get from the dead rabbit at his feet. "What the hell, Derek! Gross!"

Derek barks at him. It sounds disappointed. Stiles sighs. "I mean, thanks, Derek. I hate rabbits. So thanks for killing this one, I guess? Am I supposed to, like, eat it?" Derek makes a shrugging gesture, like, *if you want to*. Stiles does not want to. But he appreciates the thought—Derek probably had to really withhold his predator instincts to stop himself from eating it himself. "You can have it, Der. Thanks, though. You did good." He runs a hand through the fur on Derek's back, and when he rumbles (purrs) in response, Stiles goes a little deeper and applies himself to the task.

He almost doesn't feel the whooshing when it courses through him, because he wasn't expecting it. It's longer than usual, almost double the length. "Whoa, dude, what was that? Did you—wait. The rabbit. Did that count as food? I had to make you a whole-ass meal! And you can get away with a rabbit that you offered to me and then ate yourself?" Stiles's indignation only rises when he realizes it must've counted as something else, too, for the feeling to have lasted so long. "It was a gift, too, wasn't it? You got revenge for me against my least favorite animal. You're so devious."

He starts laughing, but then he can't stop. He buries his face in Derek's fur. Turns out he's really good at shutting Stiles up.

"Okay, I think I'm starting to get delirious from being so tired. That nap did *not* help. I'll just..." he collapses onto Derek's back. Derek stands up, and tries to move, but Stiles falls right off. Derek barks impatiently until Stiles gets with the program and arranges himself on Derek's back so he won't fall off. "Onward to glory, Der," he mumbles, and falls asleep again.

--

Stiles wakes up at the Hale house, in Derek's bed. He's been in this room before when he's been bugging Derek for homework help, but Derek has never let him in or on his bed. This must be a special occasion. Stiles rolls over to ask Derek about it, but he's not there. Stiles stumbles downstairs to see if he's in the kitchen having breakfast. He's not. It's just Derek's uncle Peter, making eggs on the stove.

"Have you seen Derek? I just wanted to say thanks before I left."

Peter turns to him. "Derek left early this morning, Stiles."

"Oh, for work?" Stiles asks. "I thought you guys usually get the day after a full moon off. I did, and I'm not even actually in the pack."

Peter sighs. "Not for work, Stiles. As far as we can figure out, he deposited you in his room, took his wallet and a change of clothes, and ran."

"Ran?" Stiles echoes. "Where?"

“We don’t know. He wrote a note for Talia saying he ‘needed some space’ and would be back ‘at some point.’

“What?!” Stiles exclaims. “But we’re almost done with the courtship! We just need him to provide shelter, and the prolonged contact, and the—”

“Actually,” Peter cuts in, “You don’t. He also mentioned that all that was left of your courtship was the formal acceptance, or refusal, in your case. Apparently he got through all of his steps last night, with a rabbit and a ride back to the house.”

Stiles takes a step back. “So why’d he leave, then? He was almost done being tied to me!”

Peter raises an eyebrow. “That’s exactly why.”

“What?”

“Let me explain,” says Peter, pulling up a chair.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! All is (probably) revealed next chapter

Heist Capers

Chapter Notes

Woo! We have a final chapter count! This one's a little short, but it's early, so hopefully that all evens out :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Derek is...not coping well. He's basically just been sitting on his hotel bed for the past two hours, trying to figure out how the inevitable confrontation with Stiles will go down (Derek's no fool, either Stiles will find him or Derek will be drawn back by the inexorable pull towards his mate that's currently weighing heavy on his heart). Right now, he thinks it'll go a little like this:

Stiles, after Derek spills the beans: "What were you *thinking*, Derek?"

This will most likely be accompanied by an eyeroll on Stiles's end and a sigh on Derek's.

Derek: "I was thinking you hated werewolves." (or something else, equally blunt)

Stiles: "I've literally been campaigning for your rights for weeks!"

Derek: "Fine. I was thinking you didn't like me, and were just trying to get through the tasks, as you *kept on fucking saying*. "

Stiles: "Yeah, you're right. Bye forever, Derek."

Or something along those lines.

Look, Derek is fully aware of how dramatic he's being (and has been). He just—carried Stiles home, and immediately realized that everything was over. They'd completed all the steps, and once Derek formally rejected him, Stiles would have no need to see him again. And something inside Derek physically couldn't handle that at the current moment. So he's taking some time to mope, and he should not be criticized for that.

He very much *is* being criticized for that, though. Derek couldn't bear to leave his phone behind, in case Stiles, like, confessed his eternal love through text or something, but all he's getting is an endless stream of texts from his mother and sisters, calling him a dumbass in various ways, ranging from the caring but disapproving (his mother) to the profane (Cora).

There are no texts from Stiles. He turns his phone off.

"What's there to explain?" asks Stiles. He's starting to smell a rat. Crossing his arms, he asks, "What have you been keeping from me?"

"Oh, nothing," says Peter. "Just a little life-altering news. No big."

Stiles narrows his eyes. "Spill, or I go to Talia."

At that, Peter outright laughs. "Oh, good luck with that, dear. This is something only *I* know. Well, Derek too, but I knew it first. All Talia would be able to do is order me to tell you. And I'm going to tell you anyway, because I think this farce has gone on long enough. Even if it was of my own devising. At least *I* know when to quit."

What the fuck? Aloud, Stiles says, “Well if you’re going to tell me, just *tell* me. Stop relishing the moment or whatever the fuck—”

“Yes, alright,” says Peter. “You should know, though, that I’m only telling you this because I truly love my nephew, and I think you’re ready to hear it.” Stiles waves his hand in a ‘go on’ gesture, and Peter continues.

“When you were eleven, your mother died. As you now know, she was a Spark.”

“Straight for the jugular, huh?” says Stiles thickly. He blinks several times in quick succession, and feels better. “What does this have to do with—”

“Stop interrupting, and I’ll tell you. Now, Sparks have many powers that go rather beyond the ability to use mountain ash that my lovely sister told you about yesterday. They are the most human of supernatural creatures, yet the most attuned to those creatures’ magic. Werewolves have very little magic—our transformations are physical and biological in nature. Our pack bonds are perhaps the only other magic we have besides our mates.”

“Your mates?”

“Will you just let me get through this! Yes, our mates. Werewolves have the innate magical ability to sense our soulmates. The more cynical among us say it’s just about biological compatibility, while the most romantic believe it means a true and perfect match, body and soul. Regardless, mates are where magic comes into a werewolf’s makeup, and as such, they are something Sparks must also understand. Your mother was a particularly powerful Spark, but even had she not been, she would’ve been able to tell at your birth that you were one of those mates.”

Stiles starts upright. Peter had gone into full storytelling mode, starting to lull him back to sleep, until this moment. “Wait, what—”

Peter holds a hand up. Stiles shuts up, if only because he needs to hear the rest of this. “You’re wondering why she didn’t tell you, I’m sure. I believe she thought it best for it to be something you figured out for yourself. I suppose she didn’t expect you’d be such a late bloomer, magic-wise. Or she thought she’d be around to tell you herself if that were the case. Either way, she didn’t get the chance to tell you. But she *did* get the chance to tell me.”

“You? Why the *fuck*—”

“Because I was there, Stiles. I assure you, she harbored no secret love for me, if that’s what you’re thinking. But I was at the hospital the day she died, and your father was not. As you may recall.” Peter’s eyebrow twitches, like he was going to lift it sardonically, but thought better of it considering the context. Stiles appreciates the attempt at basic human decency.

“I remember. So she told you I was, what, destined to be someone’s soulmate? I mean, that sounds like bullshit. But more importantly, you should’ve fucking *told* me. I can’t believe you would keep this from me!” Stiles can’t figure out if he’s more sad or angry, but his mouth has apparently decided on angry.

“I was going to. I wanted to wait until you and your father were at least a little more emotionally stable, and by the time you seemed better, I just didn’t want to open that wound back up again.”

“Sounds like excuses to me,” mutters Stiles.

Peter waves a hand, pushing that aside. “Be that as it may, I kept putting it off, and then you were thirteen. Thirteen, and scared of losing your best friend, and railing at the alpha of my pack on her own front porch. I didn’t think you’d take it well at that point, but I knew Derek would figure it out at some point if you were hanging around all the time, so I—ahem—misplaced your application so that I could reveal at a better moment, when you were more mature. So that I could trick you into courting Derek, and at least give him *some* time with his mate, even if you continued to think of us as exclusionist fucks.”

Okay, so this is...a lot to process. “Derek? I’m his...”

“Yes. Indeed.”

Stiles files that away for a moment to focus on the issue at hand. “Why are you telling me all this? Doesn’t seem to go with your whole mystery vibe.”

“Well, I do love my nephew. And when I saw that you were actually a good person, I tried to convince him to tell you the truth. Or at least, the truth he knows. Which is that you’re his mate. He’s not privy to this whole plot of mine.”

“Why didn’t he, then?” Stiles asks.

Peter snorts. “Well, because he’s learned not to take advice from me, I suppose. And he thought you’d be mad.”

“Of course I’d be—of course I *am* mad! He let me do all this thinking it was a fake courtship! Hell, he probably didn’t even plan on rejecting me at the end!”

Okay, maybe that’s not fair. Derek seems like he’s big on consent. Plus, if Stiles is his magical wolfy soulmate, he probably wouldn’t want to screw him over. Maybe.

"I assure you, he will reject the courtship if that's what you want. You should ask yourself if it *is* what you want, though," says Peter, winking knowingly. It's quite creepy.

"I don't even know anymore," says Stiles. "I should probably find him first. Do you have any idea where he might have gone?"

"No," says Peter. "I'm sure you'll figure it out, and go get your man."

"He's not my man," Stiles grumbles.

"Yet!" says Peter. Stiles flips him off, and leaves the kitchen.

--

Scott, Lydia, Danny, Cora, and Stiles are all gathered in Stiles's kitchen, which he has dubbed (much to Lydia's displeasure) their base of operations. Stiles's dad is on a shift, which is convenient, because what they're doing—or more specifically, what Danny will be doing—is a bit on the gray side of the law.

"I don't understand why I can't just sniff him out," says Scott. "I've gotten really good at it, you know. One of the best in the pack, Alpha Talia says." Stiles pats his arm comfortingly.

"You *are* gonna sniff him out. But you're only phase 1, bro. You can get us to Derek's general location, but Danny's gonna have to fine-tune it from there. Thanks, man, by the way."

"No problem," says Danny. "I didn't have anything else to do on a Thursday."

“Except school,” Lydia sniffs. “*I* can afford to skip, but *you* still can’t do a simple chain integration problem.”

“Lydia,” says Cora, “play nice. Why did you force yourself into this if you’re just here to insult Danny?”

“Obviously I’m here for you,” says Lydia. “You’re not going on any dumbass quests without me. And god knows Stiles and Scott can’t handle *anything*.”

“I resent that,” says Stiles. “I literally only wanted Scott and Danny to be here, for this exact reason.”

Cora crosses her arms. “Too bad. It was dumb of you and Uncle Peter to have a super private conversation in our *kitchen* if you didn’t want it to be heard.”

“I didn’t know we were *going* to have a super private conversation when I got into it!” Stiles objects. “Whatever. Are we clear on the plan?” Everyone nods, and they head out to the Jeep. Scott claims shotgun, and sticks his head out the window immediately.

“Okay, we wanna go...south, I think. Get on the southbound freeway,” says Scott, sniffing the air. It’s kind of hilarious looking, but Stiles avoids the impulse to laugh on the grounds that if he does, Cora will probably eviscerate him, and then Lydia will have no competition for valedictorian. So he keeps quiet, and merges onto the 101-south.

--

Scott gets them all the way to the edges of San Francisco, where all the smells and people start to overwhelm him and he’s no longer able to pick out Derek’s specific scent. That’s when Danny comes in. They park outside a Starbucks with internet, and Danny starts looking up hotels in the city. He

would have pinpointed Derek's location with his cell phone signal, but it's not on, and the stuff Danny would need to make it happen even with the phone off isn't really something that can be thrown together in a couple hours. So, hacking into hotel websites it is.

They sit there tensely for a few minutes, just watching. At least, Stiles and Cora are tense. Scott is his usual optimistic, everything will work out just fine, self, and Lydia doesn't really know Derek, so she's only marginally worried on behalf of her girlfriend.

After about twenty minutes, Stiles has had enough of silent fidgeting. He's about to say as much when Danny says, "Gotcha! The Marriot on Union Square. Shall we?"

"We shall," says Stiles, gunning the engine. He feels like a *Mission: Impossible* character.

--

Hotel lobby workers, shockingly, don't super want to let random teens in on the rooms their guests are staying in. Lydia has to charm (and bribe) it out of them. Stiles is very content to stand back and watch her work. She's poetry in motion, honestly. The receptionist doesn't stand a chance.

Once they've gotten the room number, Stiles and company shoot upstairs on one of those fancy glass elevators where you can see everyone going about their business in the lobby and the hallways. Stiles and Scott grin at each other. They've always wanted to ride in one of these. On the seventh floor, they step out into the hallway and seek out room 705.

"Okay, so how are we going about this?" Stiles asks in a hushed whisper. It's not really necessary, since most hotels

have soundproofed rooms to be sensitive to their guests with enhanced senses. The whispering suits his mood, though.

“You’ll be the one to talk to him, of course,” says Cora. “This is your guys’ shit to deal with. But as for actually getting a foot in the door—”

Cora quite literally puts her foot in the door. It shatters. *I guess they account for werewolf senses, but not werewolf superstrength*, Stiles realizes.

Lydia grabs Cora’s arm. “Okay, we’re going downstairs to pay the hotel for that door, and then you and I are finding a closet somewhere to make out in. Good luck, Stiles!” She drags Cora to the elevator, and Scott follows, clearly trying to avoid stepping on Stiles’s moment. He’s a good bro.

On the other side of what used to be the door to room 705, Derek is looking at Stiles. Stiles takes a deep breath and steps over the debris. “Hey, Der.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! Next chapter is gonna be the actual big showdown (read: conversation, lol), which I may have promised last chapter would be in this one... but it was going to be way too long if I included that, so you get the lead-up instead. Next chapter should wrap some things up, and then there will be an epilogue of sorts. Let me know your thoughts in the comments :) Also, thank you to everyone who has commented, it makes me very happy.

For Real

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Sorry for the wait, it's been a stressful two weeks and I rarely had the energy to write. But here we are, back at it at last! This is the final chapter of the official story, but there will be an epilogue coming soon! Probably next week, but I might try and do it sooner, since this one took a while.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Derek's eyes widen, and he looks to the window for a second, as if he's thinking of vaulting out of it to avoid his feelings. Stiles can relate—well, sort of. He gets the avoiding your feelings part, but he doesn't have the coordination for the window jumping bit.

Either way, Derek seems to realize that he's being dumb, or maybe he's just resigned, because he sits down on the edge of the bed and says, "hey," all quiet and soft.

Stiles sits down on the other end of the bed and crosses his arms. "So? Wanna give me a rundown on what all this is about?" Sure, he heard it all from Peter, but who knows how reliable that man is. No matter how much he may love his family, he's always going to give off sketchy vibes to Stiles.

"Not really," says Derek. "That *is* why I ran away to San Francisco this morning."

"Surely that wasn't a long-term plan," Stiles counters. He's trying to keep his cool.

Derek takes a breath. "No. I mean, I was going to come back eventually. I was just, um, scared."

"Of?"

Derek waves a hand in an expansive gesture. "You. This."

"Descriptive."

"Um." Derek scratches the back of his neck, looking down.

Stiles loses all patience. "Ok, the one-word bullshit is getting to me. Peter told me, all right? I'm willing to hear you out if you actually *explain* instead of just giving vague non-answers and expecting me to wheedle everything out of you!"

His outburst hangs in the air for a moment before Derek finally speaks.

"Okay. I don't know what exactly Peter told you and what you think you know but I'll tell you what *I* know. Um, you know about mates, right? Like, as a concept?"

Stiles nods once, shortly.

"Right. So, it's not something we, like, innately know from birth. It's something we figure out based on scent and sight and sound, usually once we've reached maturity. In this case, once we've *both* reached maturity. Mom always said it wouldn't be fair if one half knew before the other, especially if one half was way older. Because that would be creepy. So I mean, I should've told you. I know I should've. It'd been ingrained into me since I was born that mates keep nothing from each other, especially the fact that they're mates. *Especially* if one of them isn't a werewolf and can't sense it. But when I first saw you, I thought you *could* sense it."

“What? Why?” Stiles interrupts.

“Well, your mother was a Spark. I guess I thought you knew that. And that you were one, too. If you’d gotten proper training instead of starting just a few days ago, you would’ve been able to sense it.” Derek takes a breath, as if to gather his courage. “That’s what I thought you were doing, that first day on the lawn.”

Stiles bursts out laughing. “Holy shit, I did *not* connect that! I knew that excuse you gave was bullshit but oh my god. You straight-up thought I was going to initiate a long-term, courtship bond with you just because I realized we were mates, before even *talking* to you about it? Dude!” With a particularly violent full-body laugh, he rolls off the bed. He hears Derek huff out a laugh from where Stiles is lying face-down on the floor, and then he’s being picked up and brought back onto the bed. Derek puts him down very gently, which Stiles appreciates, honestly. It’s nice to be handled with care.

It’s comfortable and nice for a minute, and then Stiles starts talking. “Wait, so your mom always said to tell the other person right away. But you obviously didn’t do that. What happened?”

“What happened is I accepted your courtship, realized you hadn’t meant to do it, and ran away. I...seem to do a lot of running away. But anyway. When I ran away, I was trying to figure out what to do. And then Peter was there. And he knew what to do. And I’m not trying to put all the blame on him, because I agreed to it, but he came up with the idea of faking it with you. Since as far as I knew, you still didn’t like the Hale pack. It was definitely manipulative (“no argument there,” Stiles snorts) but I didn’t want to take the risk of being rejected outright. I guess I just set myself up to be

rejected later instead.” Derek laughs a little at that, even though it’s clearly not funny to him.

Stiles scoots a little closer. “Mates are really important to you guys, huh? I mean, Peter explained it a little. But it sounded kinda weird and fake. Like, you can just sniff out the perfect person for you?”

Derek scoots over, too, but in the opposite direction, as if he’s trying to maintain the exact same amount of space between them as they started out with. Stiles ignores that, and moves closer again. At this point, Derek’s on the edge of the bed. “It’s not quite like that. We can’t follow our noses to the ends of the earth in search of our soulmates if that’s what you’re thinking. But we can tell when they’re—” he gulps, as Stiles moves over again. Their legs are pressing against each other. “Close,” Derek finishes, in a strangled whisper.

Stiles isn’t normally one to pass up on a good ‘making fun of Derek’ moment, but he refrains, just this once, because Derek looks like he’s about to spontaneously combust. But Stiles isn’t going to back down *completely*. He makes this clear by putting a hand on Derek’s thigh and squeezing, juuuuust a little. It’s non-threatening, technically, but Derek looks at his hand like it’s a viper. Well, maybe Stiles *does* mean to be a little threatening. That’s well within his rights.

“If you can tell when I’m close,” Stiles asks, “why didn’t you run?”

Derek hadn’t been expecting that. He hadn’t expected any of this, to be fair. That could probably be the title of his biography, if he ever did anything worth writing down, besides being the son of Talia Hale and (maybe) the mate of

one of the faces of the werewolf rights movement. He'd left that morning knowing it was over and wanting some time to come to terms with that by himself, and now he's got his mate practically in his lap, being his usual pushy self. It's a lot for one guy to handle. So is Stiles's question.

After a minute, he just blurts out the first thing that comes into his head. That probably means it's the truth, but he's not going to psychoanalyze it too much. "Why would I run from you? Especially now that you've proved you'll chase after me." Stiles's eyebrows go up. And up. They meet his hairline, and look like they'd go further if Stiles's face muscles would allow it. "What?" Derek asks, feeling self-conscious. It's not a new feeling.

"Now that I've proved I'll go after you? Where have you been this whole month? What do you think I've been *doing*?" Stiles asks. He punctuates each sentence with a poke to Derek's sternum. Derek grabs the hand on the third poke and puts it on top of Stiles's other hand, still resting on Derek's thigh.

"You haven't been chasing after me. You've been trying to get the courtship done so you could get out of that stupid contract!"

Stiles scoffs, opening his mouth to retaliate. Derek puts a hand over his mouth. Stiles licks it. Immediately. Like he wouldn't know a self-preservation instinct if someone hit him over the head with one. Derek is undeterred, though.

"Don't try and tell me that's not what this has been about. Every time we interact, you remind me that you're doing it for a purpose. Even when it wasn't for the courtship, you came over with homework you needed help with. What was I supposed to think?"

At this point, Stiles remembers that his hands aren't magnetically attached to Derek's thigh, and he reaches up and peels Derek's hand off his mouth. He glares at Derek, fierce and wonderful.

"Yeah, maybe at the beginning I was hanging out with you just to get shit done. You can't blame me for that, we didn't know each other. But how much homework help can a guy need before the other guy gets a clue? It's like you have no idea how to read a social interaction in any way that might be slightly in your favor. Not everyone is out to get you, or your family. And if you seriously think I'm not attracted to you—"

Stiles puts his hands on Derek's thighs again, but this time it's for a purpose. He leans forward and he—

He—

He tastes like corn chips. Derek remembers wildly that that's his favorite on-the-road snack. He tastes like corn chips, and he smells like mate, and he's soft and hard in all the right places. He battles Derek down until he's flat on the back on the bed, Stiles hovering above him. He's *smiling*. Derek can feel himself smiling back, helplessly.

When Stiles is done rocking Derek's world (what? He's cocky. Sometimes) he leans back, straddling Derek's legs. "So, are we done being dumb?"

Derek smiles at him, soft and small and private. "Yeah. I know what we have to do."

--

There's more people on the lawn, this time. Stiles and Scott and Stiles's Dad and Talia and Peter, sure. But Derek's here, from the beginning instead of charging out of the house halfway through. Cora and Lydia are in the back, holding hands and looking disheveled. Well, Cora looks disheveled. Lydia brought a comb. Danny's here too, looking a bit uncomfortable. What's really different, though, is the atmosphere. Everyone is happy—at least, Stiles and Derek are happy, and as they're the interested parties, Stiles thinks that counts as good enough.

Talia gives him a nod, and Stiles steps forward. "Alpha Hale, I formally announce my successful courting of your beta, Derek Hale. Derek, do you accept this courtship's success?"

"Yes," says Derek.

Talia steps forward. "Do you, Derek and Stiles, intend to mate at this time?"

"No."

Stiles imagines that if anyone was here who *hadn't* heard their plan, this is when the shocked murmurings would start up. But everyone remains quiet.

Talia smiles. "Then I dissolve your bond." Stiles feels one final magical whoosh. He squeezes Derek's hand.

"Next time we do this," Derek whispers to him, "we're doing it right."

Stiles looks up at him. "What, this way wasn't right? Why Derek, how dare you!"

Derek rolls his eyes. "Fine. Next time, we're doing it better. For real."

“For realsies,” Stiles agrees.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed it! Feel free to let me know in the comments :) Also let me know if the ending is unclear--I meant to imply that they decided not to go through with the courtship/mating bond immediately because the whole thing had been a bit of a disaster the first time around and they wanted to do it the normal way (as in, after dating for a while). And let me know what you want in the epilogue (other than fluff, which is my current plan for it. just...so much fluff)

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

We did it!!!!!! I'm SO EXCITED!!!!!!! Be warned, this is almost entirely fluff. Almost 6000 words of it :)))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Can’t we both do it at the same time?”

If Stiles had known what a controversy that simple question was going to cause, he wouldn’t have asked it.

Wait, who is he kidding? Yes, he would’ve. And he did.

--

Here’s the thing. Stiles and Derek love each other. That’s been pretty well established, especially since last year and the Crisis That Must Not Be Named. Specifically, Stiles suddenly wondering if Derek only loves him because they’re mates, leading to 1) a screaming fight that Stiles’s *dad* was called in to break up, 2) Stiles getting the real lowdown on mates from the surprising tag-team of Peter (useless, but funny), Cora/Lydia (informative but with a lot of kissing in front of him), and Derek (unintelligible due to crying) and 3) a lot of professions of love, generally of the ‘til death do us part’ and ‘let me list ten things I love about you every day’ variety.

So, largely because of the ‘til death do us part’ thing, but partly because they’ve always planned on doing it, Stiles and Derek are sealing the deal. Werewolf-style, at least. Stiles hasn’t managed to wrangle a proposal out of Derek, and whenever he’s tried it himself, even in the mirror, he

can't even form the word 'will.' He's working on it, because he kind of wants to be the one to propose, if only to get one up on Derek. For now, though, they're sticking with the tried-and-true method, since it worked before. But this time it's gonna work better, because this time it's for real, and nobody's under any illusions otherwise.

Everything is smooth sailing, until they hit the wrinkle formerly known as Stiles's mouth, and ideas, and brain. They're talking with Talia to prepare the initial step of the courtship process, and she asks which one of them is doing the actual courting. Werewolf courtship has changed a bit in recent years, allowing either of the couple, whether wolf or human, to do the courting, and in fact allowing most of the ceremony to be dispensed with altogether. Wolves can get human-married, and that counts as mating, as long as the Alpha approves. Stiles and Derek are too nostalgic not to do their courtship again, though.

When Talia asks who's initiating the courtship, Stiles's brain blanks. They hadn't actually discussed that, for some reason. And even if they had—

"Can't we both do it at the same time?"

And here we are.

--

Talia takes a step back, raising an eyebrow. Tragically, Stiles still hasn't acquired that skill. He's beginning to think his facial muscles are refusing to do it out of spite, or maybe because if he *could* raise one eyebrow, he would become too hot for the world to handle. Yeah, probably the second one.

"I don't see why not. There's nothing in the by-laws preventing it. Derek, do you—"

"Yes," says Derek. "That's genius." He turns to Stiles, looking determined. "It's on."

"Um," says Stiles. "*What's* on?"

Derek grins, devious. "The race, duh. Whoever gets through all the steps first wins."

"What do I win?"

"*I*," Derek emphasizes, "get to propose first."

"What?!" Stiles shoots out of his chair. "How did you—"

"You've been practicing in the mirror, while I'm at home. Just because I work from home doesn't mean I'm always working, you know."

Stiles rolls his eyes. "Yeah, sometimes you're spying on your unsuspecting mate. And even if I *was* doing that, how could you tell? I never got the words out!"

"You were on one knee, Stiles," says Derek patiently. "You were holding the ring out."

"You saw the ring? Dude, not cool!"

"You never opened the box, because you never even got past the part where you say my name all soft and romantic."

"Boys!" Talia cuts in. "As funny as this is, we're going to have to move on. The stakes of your bet can be decided amongst yourselves, at a later date, when you're not in my kitchen. For now, we're agreed that you're both going to

court each other, eliminating the need for the traditional reciprocal part after the full moon run?"

"Yeah," says Stiles. He's fired up now. No way is Derek beating him at this. Stiles has already done it once, and if he does say so himself, he kicked ass.

"Yes," Derek agrees. "You're going down," he whispers in Stiles's ear, nipping his earlobe. Talia coughs pointedly, and he straightens, the picture of innocence.

--

"...and then he told me he'd seen me practicing in the mirror! I mean, what happened to preserving the mystery?! And he had the *nerve*, the absolute *audacity*, to criticize the fact that I never actually managed to say the words! It never even crossed his mind that I was doing that just to throw him off and make it extra surprising when I executed a flawless, tear-less, perfectly paced proposal!" With that, Stiles flops down on the couch next to Scott, who's managing to take it all in stride, despite just getting off a very long shift at the veterinary hospital.

"Were you, though?"

"Was I what?" Stiles asks.

"Were you trying to throw him off by crying every time you tried to say will you marry me?" Scott clarifies.

"Of course not, Scotty! I couldn't even say it all clearly and calmly right now, and I don't have the ring or the man with me."

"I think you'll feel better about it once you've gotten through some of the courting," says Scott. "You'll feel

secure in your romantic abilities, and in how much Derek loves you."

"Probably," says Stiles. "Either way, we are planning the *best* proposal for him. I'm getting Lydia in on this."

"Smart," says Scott. "You do that."

"Are you kicking me out?" Stiles levels Scott with a look of mock hurt.

"Yeah, I need to sleep. You are the anti-sleep. Go bother Lydia."

"Fine. I'll text you proposal updates when I have them."

"You don't have to," says Scott, laughing.

"Oh, but I *want* to," says Stiles. He gives his best evil laugh and leaves to go bother Lydia, as requested.

--

Lydia, shockingly, is just fine with being bothered. "It'll be a nice break from my thesis," she says, putting aside one of her many incomprehensible math books to give Stiles her full attention. "Now, what's your plan so far? Do you have a theme? Have you figured out all the courting steps? There should be a common element to all of them, and little callbacks to each in the proposal itself. Here, I'll take notes." She pulls out a pen and paper, looking at Stiles expectantly. He sits down on the other side of the table, because it's not like he can do anything else once Lydia gets going.

"I didn't expect you to be this invested," he comments. "Actually I thought you'd kick me out. Scott did. It was out

of love, but still.”

Lydia brandishes her pen at him and grins, shark-like. “Cora told me everything. She’s helping Derek. I think she expected me to be on her side, but our relationship thrives on competition. Besides, this is a good dry run for my own proposal.”

Stiles should have known Lydia would have ulterior motives. It’s one of the things he likes best about her. Still, he has to put his foot down. “Just to remind you, this isn’t *actually* your proposal, so I get full creative control. And I already have a plan, I just need a little help with the logistics. That’s where you come in.” With that, he explains his plan.

Lydia leans back in her chair. “Well, Stilinski, looks like you’ve got it handled. We’ll just have to see if you choke at the last second.”

“I won’t—”

“When I say Cora told me everything, I mean *everything*, Stiles. Including your many failed attempts to propose to your own reflection.”

“Reflections can be intimidating!” Stiles protests. Lydia rolls her eyes and ushers him out the door.

“Go get started. It wouldn’t do for you to fall behind this early in the game.”

--

The announcement of intent to court goes smoothly, except for the part where both Derek and Stiles end up screaming the ritualistic words at Talia in an attempt to each be louder than the other. There’s no logical reason for louder to mean

'better,' but Stiles thinks it's quite possible that logic has already flown from both their brains. If that's the case, it's only going to get worse as the process continues. Stiles is looking forward to a long engagement to regain the use of his brain cells.

Once it's officially started, the race to complete the steps begins.

--

Stiles learns very quickly that shoving food into someone's mouth is emphatically *not* the way to go. However, he also learns that eating dinner with them, working together to prepare the meal as they do every night, *is*. The first round is done only half a day after the courtship started, and they're tied. They take out their mutual frustration at not winning with a rather athletic tumble in the sheets, which leaves Stiles hanging face first off the bed, fast asleep, and Derek with his head on the armchair and his legs on the bed. All in all, it's not a restful night for either of them.

--

Derek tries to give Stiles a deed to a house the next morning. Stiles just *looks* at him. Derek throws his hands up. "Fine! Obviously that was stupid. We already have an apartment together, what more could I do?"

That actually stumps Stiles for a second. He had been sort of hoping his rain jacket thing would work this time around. If not, he was gonna go beat up some rogue hunters. Assuming he could find any—the Argents and the Hunter Council had really cracked down after the Hale attack and the subsequent copycat attacks. So, partly because he has no real answer for Derek, he asks him a question instead.

“Are you actually invested in this? It seems like it’s just a competition to you.”

Derek takes a step back, eyes wide. “What? Why would you think that?”

Stiles crosses his arms defensively. “Because—you just threw money at it! I mean, a fucking *house*? Why did you think that would work?”

“A house seems like a pretty standard definition of shelter, Stiles. It’s not like we weren’t eventually going to get one—I just sped up the process a little.”

“...what?” It comes out soft, shocked. Which is strange, because Stiles has been thinking about marriage—he has a *ring*, for god’s sake—but maybe he just, like, hadn’t conceptualized it? Because of course they would move into a house eventually. But—

“I thought we’d be living on pack land,” Stiles says after a minute. “This house is in the suburbs.”

Derek takes two quick steps forward until he’s just about on top of Stiles. “You want to live on pack land? I didn’t want to pressure you—I mean, I know you like the pack, but it can be a lot and we totally don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

With that, he takes one of Stiles’s hands in both of his.

“Honestly, I’m happy wherever you are. The house was... stupidly competitive with a dash of anxiety about the pack houses and a little insecurity about the fact that you’ve done this before and I haven’t.”

Stiles blinks. That was a lot of honesty. He says as much, because that’s something he and Derek try and make a point of, after their rocky beginning. Derek rolls his eyes,

but he's blushing, so it's a win for Stiles. Then he adds, "Yeah, I've done this before, but it's not like I nailed it."

Derek snorts. "Yeah, you really didn't."

"Shut up, I'm trying to be sappy here. I don't have any sort of advantage here, if that's what you're thinking. We shouldn't make this a competition if we're just going to think about it like that. It's supposed to be romantic, right? Let's do that, okay?"

Derek smiles at him and brings the hand he's holding up to his mouth to kiss it. It should look dumb, but he manages to pull it off like he's Mr. Darcy himself. "You're right, Stiles. I think we can handle it, though. As long as we remember the end goal instead of just focusing on showing each other up."

"I don't have to focus to show you up," says Stiles. "Now, will you do the honors, or shall I?" He holds the deed to the house up and waves it back and forth. Derek takes one corner, Stiles takes the other, and they rip. Stiles is under no illusions that that actually dissolves their ownership of this house, but he will feel no remorse in making Derek deal with the paperwork part by himself.

"Great!" says Stiles, bouncing on the balls of his feet. "Now let's go talk to Talia about a house on the pack land. Do you have one in mind?"

"The one with the little maze in the backyard," Derek admits. "It'd be good for kids. They could learn to walk and to fend for themselves in the wilderness of the maze." Stiles is almost convinced for a minute, until he sees Derek's lip twitching. He bursts out laughing.

When Stiles catches his breath, he reels Derek in for a kiss. When he pulls back he says, "That sounds good. Minus the

abandoning any potential kids in the backyard part. Let's do it, yeah?"

"Yeah," says Derek.

The swooshing feeling takes them both by surprise.

--

To nobody's shock, they get through the 'prolonged physical contact' step very easily. Stiles uses it as an excuse to try something new involving handcuffing their wrists together, which doesn't do much for their sex life but does mean that Stiles's dad yells at him at work the next day for 'suspiciously dinged-up handcuffs' and 'not being professional with work items.'

The next step, however, causes a lot more problems.

"No, hear me out, Cora!" Derek feels like he's onto something with this. "The ring would count as a gift, right? Perfect loophole." He takes another sip of his wine. It's wolfsbane-infused, because he and Cora have hit a dead end on this one and they needed to let out their frustrations somehow.

"Toooootally," says Cora. She falls off the couch again, picks herself up, and drapes herself back on the couch like it never happened. Honestly, Derek's not sure it *did* happen. That could just be the wine talking, though. Then, Cora grips the back of the couch and levers herself into a sitting-up position to look Derek straight in the face. "Wait, didn't you two just decide you weren't going to do anything dumb like that?"

“Yeah!” Derek waves his hand enthusiastically, almost hitting the other hand, which is holding the wine glass. “Oh, that could’ve been bad. Anyway, yeah, we decided to focus on the end result instead of just the competition. Isn’t that what I’m doing?”

Cora narrows her eyes and takes a few seconds to think. Well, it could be minutes. Who’s Derek to know? “I think... it’s not a loophole. I think it’s cheating. Derek, that’s *cheating!* ”

Derek sits bolt upright. Wine sloshes out of his glass and onto his shirt, but he ignores it. “Cheating?? I would never! We’re doing this the right way so I can *earn* this proposal! Get out the brainstorming notebook!”

Cora rolls her eyes and does nothing. Derek takes a second to contemplate his reasoning for recruiting her to his team. Oh yeah, it’s because she’s his sister and he had no choice.

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Derek and Stiles have exchanged more gifts in the past three weeks than they do at the average Christmas, and nothing has stuck. It’s discouraging, for several reasons. The first, of course, is that Derek really wants to propose to Stiles. He knows that Stiles doesn’t hold a grudge about the clusterfuck that was the beginning of their relationship, but Derek still sort of feels like Stiles has proved his love, and Derek hasn’t. Everyone Derek knows has told him that’s stupid at least once. Stiles, who has told him that upwards of a thousand times, is an outlier and should not be counted. The other issue with this gift-giving failure is what it means for all their previous Christmases and birthdays and anniversaries.

“Have you liked *anything* I’ve ever gotten you?” Stiles asks. They’re in the car on the way to the Hale estate to talk to Derek’s mom. It’s been weeks of frustrating nothing, of boxes of fancy chocolate and thoughtful presents and ‘no, I think sex will count as a gift this time, Derek, you’ll see.’ So they’re turning to Derek’s mom. Not that she’s a courting expert, but it’s better than doing nothing. She can at least reassure them that this setback doesn’t mean their relationship is fucked. “Hey, answer me!” Keeping his eyes on the road, Stiles reaches out a hand to nudge Derek’s arm.

“Of course I have, Stiles! If it was up to me, any of the things you’ve gotten me would have worked! Especially the fortune cookie. I honestly feel like there’s some other issue here.”

Stiles sighs. “I guess. Let’s see what Talia says.”

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Derek’s mom doesn’t have a lot to say. She’s as confused as they are, so she takes them to the library on the second floor. “You can see what the courting books in here have to say. Maybe we’re missing something. Or maybe your situation is just strange enough to have caused a disturbance in the magic.”

“I don’t think that’s it, Talia,” says Stiles. “Not to brag, but I would’ve sensed that. The magic is working normally.”

“I don’t doubt you, Stiles. Deaton says you’re one of the best students he’s ever had. In that case, we’ll have to re-establish what normal is for this type of magic.” Derek’s mom leads them to a dusty corner of the library. Stiles sneezes immediately, four times in quick succession. Derek hands him a tissue.

"I guess we don't read these books a lot," Derek observes. His mom laughs. Stiles sneezes again.

"No, we don't," says his mom. "Most of our courting processes are fairly straightforward. You two tend to be the exception. These books were last used years ago, when we were reforming the whole courting system. Anyway, good luck!" She turns to leave, and Derek grabs her arm.

"Aren't you going to help, Mom?"

She puts a hand on top of his and smiles at him tenderly. "I think this is something you two have to do. You're not supposed to get too much help in the courting process, you know. If you don't find anything today, I'll come help tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay. Thanks, Mom. Can we stay for dinner?"

"I'm making burgers just for you," she says, smiling. With that, she swans off, poised as always, leaving them with about a hundred dusty old books to get through. Stiles turns to Derek with a suggestive look on his face. Derek has to nip that in the bud.

"No sex in my parents' library, babe," he whispers. "No matter how much I might want to."

"But—" Derek cuts him off with a finger to his lips. Stiles pushes it away and continues. "If we're supposed to do this alone, that *must* mean—"

"That is *not* what that means, love. You're ridiculous."

Stiles groans. "Fine. See if I ever want to have library sex with you again." He turns to the bookshelf and takes a book at random. "Huh. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective

Courtships. Is this a self-help book for werewolf courtships? That's amazing!"

"I don't think that's exactly what we need. I think we need an old book describing the steps in detail," says Derek. He peers over Stiles's shoulder at the book, though. Step One is 'be proactive.' "Wait, are these just the same steps as the actual book? What a rip-off!"

"I know, right?" says Stiles, grinning up at him brightly. He puts the book down. "Okay, let's focus. I'll take, uh, *Ye Olde Courteshippe*, and you take *Ye Evene Older Courteshippe*." He holds out two books, neither of which have the word 'ye' in the title. Derek takes the dustier one, because his nose is less likely to stage a revolt against him. He tugs Stiles over to the armchairs in the middle of the room, and they settle in.

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Twenty minutes later, Stiles sits bolt upright in his chair, jostling Derek's legs, which are in Stiles's lap. "Got it!" he cries, holding the book aloft.

"What?" Derek asks.

"The fourth step of the courting ritual, while deceptively straightforward, must represent a change or growth in the couple's relationship. In this way, it marks the moment of dedication to the courtship and subsequent mating for both parties.'" Stiles looks up. "That's what dusty old beard guy says, anyway. Think it means anything?"

Derek gets fully out of his chair to peer at the book with Stiles. If that means getting in Stiles's lap, well, who is he to turn down a good thing? Once he's comfortably positioned, he looks down at the book. "If this is true, why isn't it

mentioned in the beginning ceremony? How have people been doing this ritual without knowing this?"

"Huh," says Stiles. "Well, I can answer the first question, at least. This is a tiny footnote in the twelfth chapter of a super boring book by a super boring dude. Nobody's *seen* this, that's why it's not mentioned anywhere else."

"But what about—"

"And!" says Stiles, shifting in excitement so that Derek nearly falls off his lap. "I bet the gift-giving usually *does* 'mark the moment of dedication to the courtship' for most people. Weren't you telling me just recently that it was usually a 'thanks for having sex with me' gift? Since the step before it is prolonged physical contact? And back in the olden times, or even like, fifty years ago, you usually didn't have sex with someone until you were engaged at least. And werewolves like to hold out for their mates. So it would be a big moment!"

"That makes sense, babe, but what about *our* courtship? I mean, our fake one. We didn't have sex."

"Oh, our 'fake' one, that only I thought was fake?" Stiles does little quotation marks around the word 'fake.' Derek rolls his eyes. "Um, I don't know. Why *did* that fortune cookie work, Der? What did it change about our relationship?"

"Oh." Derek squirms around to look Stiles in the eye. "That was when I knew we were friends, at least. Even if you weren't ever going to love me, I knew I could be in your life as a friend. That's, um, probably it."

When Stiles has processed that, he pulls Derek in for a kiss. It lasts for a good while. When he pulls back, he kisses

Derek's forehead and says, "That's sweet, honey. And sad. It worked out in the end, though. Right?"

"Right," says Derek, leaning back in.

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When they're done not having sex in Derek's parents' library, they march upstairs to tell Derek's mom that they figured it out. She seems surprised, which is a bit insulting. It's like she had no faith in them to get anything done. Generally, that's fair, but in this one instance, they were super productive geniuses, as Stiles put it. Upon hearing what they found, though, Derek's mom has to leave immediately to tell 'all the important werewolf people.' Again, Stiles's words. "This could have been interfering with courtships for years," she says. "Thank you, boys." After she sweeps off, Stiles and Derek head back home to figure out what they're going to do. They'll have burgers with Derek's family another day.

"So what can we do?" Stiles asks, collapsing onto their bed. "I mean, the next big stage for us is probably marriage, and we're saving the proposal for the end of this, when one of us wins. Um, on that note. Is it even possible for one of us to win?"

"What do you mean?" Derek asks, lying down with his head on Stiles's stomach.

"I mean, it seems like we've been completing every step together. It's not like either of us is in the lead. I don't know if that's going to change, you know?"

"Oh." Thinking about it for a minute, Derek realizes that Stiles is right. As usual. Not that he would ever say that

aloud. "I mean, the main reason I wanted to propose is because I feel like maybe I owe it to you?"

Stiles sits up, dislodging Derek's head. "Wait, what? What does *that* mean?"

"Whoa, I didn't mean it like that! I meant, like, you had to do the courtship the first time around, and you proved that you loved me, but I haven't done the same. So maybe it's my turn."

Stiles just laughs. When he recovers, he says, "Sorry. I know that's not funny to you. But the idea that you haven't proved your love to me—that's actually laughable. I mean, if we base it on nights you spent helping me study for finals in college alone, you've proved your love."

"But what about last year?" Last year, the worst fight of their relationship, over the nature of mates.

"We've gone over this. It was a throwaway comment that *maybe* had a little basis in my own worries, but got blown way out of proportion. I've *never* seriously doubted you, after you told me everything that day in San Francisco. I don't want you to feel like you have to propose to me to make things even."

"Fine," says Derek, grinning. "Then we'll both propose, and we both get rings."

"Okay," Stiles says. "I claim right after the closing courtship ceremony, so I have extra excuses if I cry."

"*If*," says Derek, rolling his eyes.

"Fine, *when*," says Stiles. Derek pulls him back down onto the bed. They almost miss the swooshing feeling, because

they're rather occupied at the time.

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All that's left now is the full moon run, since they managed to level up in their relationship by 'dealing with our shit and actually growing up a little,' as Stiles put it. Derek likes to think of things in the way Stiles puts them, sometimes. It makes him feel good, that he gets to understand *The World as Stiles Sees It*. Also, Stiles is funny. That's just one of his many wonderful qualities.

Derek has been a little sappy lately, because he's planning his proposal. Initially, it was going to be a whole big thing, because he thought he had something to prove. Realizing that he doesn't—and that Stiles never doubted him in the first place—is quite freeing. He prefers to be sappy in the small things, not the big ones. So he's been making lists of things he likes about Stiles, which he's using to plan his proposal speech *and* his vows. His wedding vows are going to connect to his proposal and Stiles is going to *cry*, damnit. Not that that's too hard to make happen. Still, Derek is putting his best foot forward.

Right now, his feet are about to be paws. He's standing next to Stiles in the moon run formation, taking off his clothes. Stiles is saying something about appreciating his body but wishing they didn't have so many voyeurs. Derek rolls his eyes. Yeah, because they're going to have sex right now, in the two seconds that Derek is nude but not yet a wolf. That seems likely. To placate him, Derek leans over and gives Stiles a kiss.

"This is better than the last time, at least," he says when he pulls back.

“Yeah,” says Stiles. “I’m not afraid of your naked body this time.” He looks Derek up and down, unashamed. Derek laughs.

“Yeah, and I won’t be pulling a disappearing act after the run this time,” he adds. Stiles opens his mouth to respond, but Derek’s mother starts her speech at that moment. Derek tunes it out until he hears the howl. Then his bones start to crack and reform and within the space of a blink, he’s a wolf. He stretches out his new-old limbs and howls, joined by the rest of the pack. Stiles runs a hand through his fur, and then they’re off.

Most of the run is a blur, with a few moments that stand out. Most of them revolve around Stiles, who gamely keeps up with him for an hour before needing to walk. Even then, he puts on bursts of speed every few minutes so Derek can chase him. Which Derek does. Stiles is wearing a red hoodie because he likes to be ironic, and Derek likes how bright it is because it’s easy to pounce on. Not that Derek can’t pick Stiles out from miles away. But the hoodie helps. Eventually, though, the rest of his pack starts howling again, a signal each wolf sends up when they return home. Stiles has been dragging for the past half hour, so Derek decides it’s time to get home. He nudges Stiles and gives the agreed-upon signal: two short yips (Stiles had refused Derek’s suggestion of simply maneuvering Stiles until he falls onto Derek’s back). Stiles nods, and starts wandering off—in the complete wrong direction. Derek runs after him. *That’s not the way to the car!* he wants to say. *What are you doing?* Stiles seems to notice his confusion after a minute.

“Oh, sorry, Your Wolfiness. I know where I’m going. We have to pick something up before we go to the car, okay?” Derek huffs, but agrees. If anything, he’s going to turn back to

human in a few minutes, now that the moon is setting, so he can argue with Stiles then.

They end up at—one of the pack houses? It's Derek's favorite, the one with the little garden maze in the back. He's confused, but he can't quite articulate why in his wolf form. Luckily, he changes back to human right after Stiles slips inside. "Stiles? What are we doing here?" They're not moving in for at least a few months. Derek had thought the tacit agreement was that they would move to pack land after they got married.

Stiles pokes his head out the front door and throws Derek some clothes. "Put those on and head around back, would you?" He closes the door before Derek can say anything, like 'no' or 'why,' which is probably smart of him. Derek puts the clothes on and heads around back.

Around back is beautiful, glowing in the beginnings of sunrise. Stiles is standing by the little pool next to the maze.

Derek is—

He thinks he's starting to put things together.

Which—

Stiles gets down on one knee, and *oh*. Derek can feel a smile breaking free, and he does nothing to stop it, because he's never been happier.

Stiles, meanwhile, is already crying. It makes Derek laugh, which makes *Stiles* laugh, which makes the bushes laugh, which, um, Derek is a werewolf. He should've been able to smell Scott and Lydia and his mother in the bushes. He ignores them, and moves serenely to stand in front of Stiles.

Stiles says, "Derek." He says, "Will you marry me," very fast, very fierce, but no less loving. He holds up the rings. He says, "I wanted to do it after the moon run because I love every part of you." He takes Derek's hand. He says, "And I wanted to do it here because we're getting married here. Well, if you want to. I hope you want to. Well?" He turns his face up to Derek, and his eyes are shining.

Derek sobs. "Yes. To all of that. Although I can't believe you're using your proposal to pick the venue for our wedding." Stiles just smiles, face glazed with tears, and slides the ring on. Derek sinks down to kneel with him and wraps his arms around his fiancé.

Scott and Lydia and Derek's mom come out of the bushes, a cacophony of voices. They join the hug, but Derek barely feels them. He's got Stiles in his arms.

Stiles is giddy. He and Derek are engaged, and they're about to be officially mated. The ceremony is short and sweet, no frills, which is lucky, because based on one night of pillow-talk wedding planning, their wedding will be the opposite. Except for the sweet part. If Stiles has his way, it's going to be *very* sweet.

They're all gathered on the sunny lawn behind the Hale House: Stiles's friends, Derek's friends, Stiles's dad, Derek's parents and sisters and uncle. Talia gives Stiles a nod.

Stiles squeezes Derek's hand, then says, "Alpha Hale, I formally announce my successful courting of your beta, Derek Hale. Derek, do you accept this courtship's success?"

“Yes,” says Derek. Then he says, “Mr. Stilinski, I formally announce my successful courting of your son, Stiles Stilinski. Stiles, do you accept this courtship’s success?”

“Yes,” says Stiles, kissing Derek’s cheek. Yeah, they’re an *obnoxious* couple. Deal with it.

Talia steps forward. “Do you, Derek and Stiles, intend to mate at this time?”

They both step forward and say yes in unison.

“I affirm your bond. You are now mates in the eyes of the Hale Pack.” She howls, and all the wolves present howl with her.

And then everyone leaves.

Wait, what? There was supposed to be a party! Stiles turns to Derek to express this injustice, but Derek’s not standing beside him anymore. He’s...kneeling. *Oh*.

Stiles starts crying immediately. Derek, annoyingly, is dry-eyed.

“Stiles,” says Derek. “I love you. I love your stupid fake basketball fouls and your humor and your eyes—I’ve always liked brown eyes—and your tenacity and everything else. It might have been love at first sight, but it was also love at second sight. And third sight, and every sight after. Will you marry me?”

“Of course, Der!” says Stiles, laughing. He holds out his hand. Derek takes it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who's been reading this!
Especially to everyone who's been commenting on
every chapter, y'all are the true MVPs. But honestly, to
everyone who's been reading, you are AMAZING and
FABULOUS and you DESERVE the 6000 words of fluffy
nonsense you just read. I hope you enjoyed!! This was
very fun to write, and my first (sort of) long-fic. I've
learned a lot tbh. Anyway, have a wonderful week. <3
<3

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